

My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 5

Takashi Kajii

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My Little Sister

Can Read

KANJI
漢字

5

Author: Takashi Kajii
Illustrator: Halki Minamura



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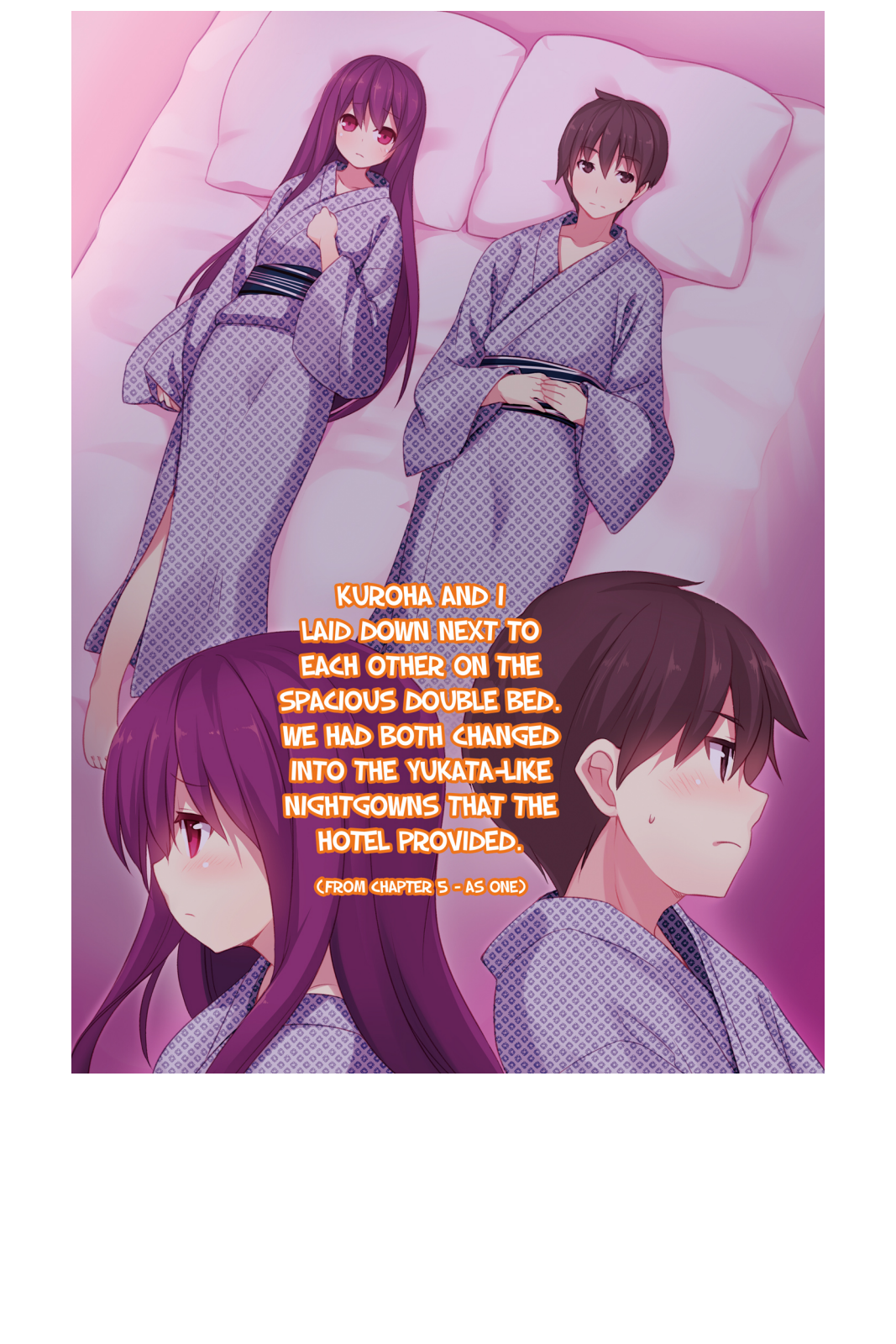




THE PROFESSOR
UTTERED SOMETHING
I COULDN'T BELIEVE.
"IF YOU DON'T GET
TOGETHER WITH
KURO-CHAN, SHE'LL
BE ERASED."

(FROM CHAPTER 1 -
A PLEADING KUROHA)





KUROHA AND I
LAID DOWN NEXT TO
EACH OTHER ON THE
SPACIOUS DOUBLE BED.
WE HAD BOTH CHANGED
INTO THE YUKATA-LIKE
NIGHTGOWNS THAT THE
HOTEL PROVIDED.

(FROM CHAPTER 5 - AS ONE)

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Chapter 1: A Pleading Kuroha

Do you all know “Ono no Imoko-chan?” Imoko-chan was a politician and adventurer from a long time ago. She used her trusty Soprano Recorder Sword to eradicate onslaughts of succubi while traveling on a ship in the shape of school loafers to ancient China. She was a fairly minor historical figure, but because her name had the kanji for “little sister” in it, she was chosen to be the central figure in this year’s annual historical anime broadcast on state TV.

Right now, the Imose family was gathered in the living room watching “Ono no Imoko-chan.”

“Panties on Parade! Take this! *Emissary of the Peeple, P Flash* ☆”

She did it! That’s our Ono no Imoko-chan! Rainbow-colored panties filled the TV screen. This week’s episode had movie-level animation quality yet again, as Imoko-chan slashed through the enemy succubi with her finisher attack, the P Flash.

Everyone around the TV was getting pumped up watching her. There was nothing better suited for a family gathering on a Sunday night than watching a government-produced historical anime.

“Did you see that, Mom and Dad? The P Flash was actually my idea. The show’s staff asked me for advice. I told them that from a literary perspective, it’s vital to portray the feeling of a full bladder. And speaking of bladders, I took the P from Pee, so I suggested that they make it ‘Emissary of the Peeple...’”

Sitting on the sofa was Odaira-sensei in his little girl form, puffing his chest out with pride. Mom and Dad were sitting on either side of him, highly impressed. But...

“‘The feeling of a full bladder?’ Again with your crude and senseless ideas... And why is Odaira-sensei here, anyway...?” said Kuroha, who was sitting on the other edge of the sofa.

“Sensei took time out of his day to visit us!” I chimed in. “Normally, we’d have to welcome him by decorating the house with panties strung together like national flags!”

“Just stuff some panties in his mouth and let him suffocate to death,” Miru interjected, evoking a grin from Sensei.

“So the absurd amount of liberties with the history were the result of Odaira-sensei’s ‘detailed’ advice...” Kuroha sighed.

“Huh? What do you mean, ‘liberties?’” I couldn’t believe it. “The school loafers-shaped ship might have been stretching it a bit, but...”

“First of all, Ono no Imoko was a man.”

“What? Even though he had the kanji for little sister in his name? The heck, how did he not take that to family court?!”

Yuzu-san, who had been listening in, remarked, “Um, my brother also loved works where historical figures were turned into girls. His favorite was one where Queen Himiko verbally abused the reader.”

“I see, a queen would make a good sadistic character. History is truly the best muse!”

“What part of that was history?! And besides, Himiko was originally a woman,” Kuroha exclaimed, which made our parents and Sensei burst out laughing.

What a comfortable family pastime. It was everyone for themselves these days, so not many families hung out together like this, but the Imose family was close. I enjoyed relaxing moments like this.

After the show ended, Yuzu-san got up.

“I’ll make some tea.”

Ack... My heart skipped a beat seeing Yuzu-san walk to the kitchen. She was wearing hand-me-downs from my mom: a pink T-shirt and shorts. But they were a bit tight on her, so the curves of her body were well defined under the fabric. I’d inherited my taste for the lower half of the body from my dad, so my eyes were naturally drawn to her ample posterior and plump thighs.

Mom and Dad glanced at me and grinned, then nodded in unison. *Ugh, they’ve got the look in their eyes like they’re about to tease us...*

“Is everyone okay with green tea?” Yuzu-san came back with the tea ready to be served on a tray, and just as expected...

“Look Gin, your number one wife is back from the kitchen.”

“Oh no, that’s not...”

Come on, what do you mean by ‘number one wife?’ Yuzu-san isn’t sure how to react, either. And what are you implying, that I have more than one?

My parents had been teasing Yuzu-san and I whenever they could. They kept asking us when we were getting married and when they’d be getting grandkids. They had it in their heads that we were going out and approved of our relationship.

It was a total misconception, though. A month ago, Yuzu-san had confessed to me, but I couldn’t sort through my emotions and give her an answer, so our relationship had remained unchanged. After being teased this much, though, my attention would naturally be drawn to her...

I glanced up at Yuzu-san, and our eyes met.

“...Oh.”

“Um...”

Both of us blushed and turned away from each other.

Thinking about it again, Yuzu-san, who looked exactly like Homyura, possessed my ideal looks in a girl. And her beauty wasn't just in her appearance, but her personality as well. A girl like that actually confessed to me, and yet here I am, still lost in my own feelings... After being blessed with such riches in life, I was sure I'd go to hell when I died.

"If Gin-kun and Yuzu-san get married, and Miru-chan and I get married, that would make me Yuzu-kun's younger brother-in-law. Though in this body, I suppose it'd be sister-in-law? Oh, to become a *gimai* myself, it's like I've completed my entire bucket list!"

"You forfeited your life long ago, geezer."

With even Sensei teasing us, Yuzu-san and I became even more awkward. Yuzu-san looked embarrassed, and I felt my chest fill up with a warm and bittersweet feeling. But then—

I detected a glare burning through my cheek. It was so hot, I could feel it... I turned around in fear, but also knew what to expect. My eyes met with Kuroha's from the sofa across from me. Her face was twisted in anger, her brows and lips twitching.

Here it comes.

Lately, Kuroha would make a certain move in these situations. Her glare continued to burn at me for a while, then she lightly tapped the table with her index finger. *That's the sign.*

I knew it, it always ends up like this... I nodded ever so slightly, so that only Kuroha would notice. Then Kuroha, who was watching my every move, stood up.

"I'm going to my room to work on my translations," she said in a bit of a rush and walked out to the hallway. She was heading upstairs, where both of our rooms were. Yuzu-san asked her if she should bring her any tea but Kuroha responded, "No thanks, I'd like to concentrate."

I glanced at the time: it was 8:45 pm. *Then... let's make it 9 pm on the dot. Fifteen minutes should be enough.* The rule that Kuroha had set was to make sure to leave at least a 10-minute gap between our exits. As for what Kuroha and I were about to do, well...

I passed the time by chatting with everyone. We talked about this week's "Imoko-chan" and about school stuff, since Yuzu-san had transferred to the same school as me. I got distracted by the conversation, and by the time I noticed, it was already 9:30.

"Oh crap..."

I resisted the urge to rush to my feet, and instead acted calm. *Don't panic.* I started talking as if I had just noticed. "Wow, it's already this late... I took a bath earlier, so I think I'll go back to my room and work on my novel. I want to focus, so I'd like to be left alone."

“TRANSLATING NOW DONT BOTHER ME”

This sign was hanging from the doorknob of Kuroha’s room upstairs. Kuroha was set to debut as a classic literature translator. This sign stated that she wanted to focus on her work, so we shouldn’t interrupt her. Everyone in our household knew how diligent Kuroha was, so whenever we saw this plate, we made sure to leave her alone.

However, this sign was a total lie. Kuroha was not in her room right now. That’s because she was...

“Onii-chan, you’re soooo late!”

I entered my room and was greeted by a piercing voice. I looked toward the owner of the voice and saw Kuroha with her arms folded tightly and her pantyhose-clad legs crossed, glaring at me. *Ack... She’s radiating anger.*

“It’s been over forty minutes. You don’t have to wait that long. The rule is at least ten minutes, but what’s up with you waiting over forty?!”

Sorry, I lost track of time while talking with everybody...

She looked unsatisfied, but then switched to a sulky expression and said in a small voice, “...Well, I guess your *number one wife* is there...”

“Huh?”

“I-It’s nothing.” She flipped her head away from me, slightly blushing. “Whatever. Let’s get started with the usual. Onii-chan... come here.”

Kuroha poked the bed with her finger. This happened every night, but... I could never get used to the way she invited me.

“...Onii-chan, y-you’re not thinking anything dirty, are you?”

“No way. It’s just that I still get nervous when you lure me to the bed.”

“L-Lure...? Why do you have to phrase it like that?!” Kuroha turned bright red and said in a hushed voice, “Don’t say that, it’s embarrassing...”

“C-Come on, let’s start a-already,” said Kuroha, readying herself.

“Yeah, I got it.”

I took out a plate from my desk drawer that read “WRITING NOW DONT BOTHER ME” and hung it outside my door. This was to make sure that the rest of the family wouldn’t interrupt us. I locked the door and sat next to Kuroha, who was now lying face-down on the bed.

“Go ahead...” she said in a whisper, then drew her hands to her hips and pulled up her white blouse. Her elegant curves and smooth skin were revealed before my eyes, and my heart started to pound.

“...Okay, I’ll start.”



I straddled myself above Kuroha's butt. To make sure I wouldn't put all my weight on her, I balanced myself on my knees and carefully lowered my legs. I felt the softness of her butt between my thighs, and my heart beat even faster. A little sister lying face down on the bed, and her older brother straddling her... What we were about to do was... write "LILSIS READ KANJI" on her body.

During summer break, Kuroha had proposed the idea that we do WRITE-ON-THE-BODY every night, and I had been serializing my novel on her back ever since. This was a secret between the two of us. Normally, we'd do it when the rest of the house was asleep, but lately she'd sometimes invite me to do it while they were still awake. It was always when our parents would start doting on Yuzu-san in front of me. I figured it was harmless jealousy, but...

"..."

"Onii-chan...? You're not writing yet, what's wrong?"

I couldn't bring my finger down to Kuroha's back. I slid her blouse back down.

"...Huh?" Kuroha brought her elbows to the bed, raised her upper body a little, and turned to me.

"Kuroha... Every night in secret, I'm touching your skin... even though we're siblings. There's got to be something wrong with that."

"...This is what I wanted. And you accepted it, Onii-chan. Do you want to stop after all this time? Are you starting to hate it...?" Kuroha looked like she was both angry and pleading with me.

"I don't hate it. But I'm not sure how to feel about using your back every night. You're the type to be concerned about morals, aren't you?"

"B-But... It's because you said that the origins of your writing were on my back..."

I had awakened to my personal writing style when Kuroha and I bathed together one day when we were younger. She wasn't wrong, but...

"I still think it's wrong to do it on your back every night." I got straight to the point. "...So let's do it with your lower half today."

"...Huh?" Kuroha responded with a blank stare.

"I'll say it again. Let's do it with your lower half."

"L-Lower half?"

"I'm going to write on the lower half of your body."

"Oh, that's what you meant... With the way you phrased it, I almost thought..."

"Well, I sort of got tired of writing on your back every day. Why don't we try other body parts once in a while?"

"Tired? I guess there's no helping that..." Kuroha hesitantly got off

the bed and stood up. I followed, then kneeled before her.

Her pantyhose-clad thighs filled my vision, and I was entranced for a moment. *Glorious*. The way the fabric covered her skin let your imagination run wild, and the focus on the curvature of her legs made it even more alluring than if they were bare. Truly this was one of the miracles of humankind.

“Kuroha, I want to be more aggressive about uncovering the miracles of humankind. Can we play ‘pantyhose-tearing?’ I’ll make sure to pay you back.”

“What...?! Why do you want to tear them?”

“WRITE-ON-THE-BODY has to be done on bare skin. I have no choice but to tear them.”

“Y-Yeah, but why did your mind automatically go to *tearing* them? You really are a *hentai*.”

“Come on, you know I get embarrassed when you compliment me like that.”

“...Fine, do whatever you want...”

“Okay, let’s start...”

Rip, rip, rip.

I put force in my fingers and tore at the pantyhose. The black fabric that covered Kuroha’s thigh opened up into an ovular shape. I placed my finger within the tear and wrote on her bare skin, “IMOKO-CHAN PANTIES THE BEST.”

“Th-That tickles... The content of your writing sure hasn’t changed, but at least you took my advice on writing style.”

“That’s because you’ve been critiquing me every night. Though in the past, you told me that I should be original after I said I wanted to be like Odaira-sensei. And now I feel like I’m losing my originality.”

“...I’ve said this before, but originality and individualism are different. You can’t write for yourself, you have to write for the readers.”

“For the readers, huh...”

“I want you to succeed, Onii-chan.” Kuroha really was looking out for me.

“...I understand. Thank you.”

“In any case, having my stockings ripped and having stuff like this written on my skin, and the fact that I’m accepting all this...” Kuroha hugged her shoulders and turned away, but didn’t seem upset.

...Is she feeling excited?

“No... I can’t awaken to anything weird... I’m still in high school...”

“Nah, Odaira-sensei said that he had already awakened by the time he was in high school. Apparently he wasn’t interested in any of the girls in his class.”

“Th-That’s a different issue, I haven’t awakened to anything.”

Wasn’t it a good thing to learn more about yourself? Okay, let’s help her out. I shifted myself behind Kuroha, looked downward, and brought my face to her right ankle.

“O-Onii-chan? Why are you so close to the floor?”

“I think it’s important for you to awaken to more things. How about this? Not ripping the pantyhose with my fingers, but... *bite*,” I wanted to try tearing her pantyhose with my mouth.

“Wha, stop that...!” Kuroha quickly raised her right foot, which I had bitten down on. Unable to balance herself with just her left foot, she started to wobble. “Kyaaaah!”

Oh? I barely had time to think before she fell back toward me, and I was still on all fours. Her butt, wrapped in pantyhose, was falling toward my face.

Thud!

“Mph, nnp...” I saw stars behind my eyelids, and when I opened my eyes, it was pitch-black. *Ahh, I see.* This pitch-black view was her pantyhose. I could also tell by the slightly coarse texture rubbing against my cheeks. Apparently I had caught her butt with my face. That also meant that my nose and mouth were being plugged up by her butt... *I-I can’t breathe... I’m suffocating...*

I fumbled around, which caused my nose to slide and get caught between her springy buttocks. This was like a battle between her butt and my nose.

Kuroha, who was quivering on top of my face like a yacht caught between ocean waves, yelped, “Ahn! S-Stop! *Hentai, hentai, hentai, hentai!*”

It’s nice that she’s praising me so much, but... if you raise your voice that much, everyone else will hear!

I remembered how Odaira-sensei said that after he turned 70, he would have the 20 little sisters in his head sit on his face. They would play musical chairs where he was the chair, and he described it as easy on his old bones since he didn’t have to move. I was accidentally experiencing literature!

“It’s not sensible for you to write on the lower body! Let’s be serious!”

“Got it, I’ll take it seriously. I’ll cut the pantyhose properly with scissors, and I’ll make sure to eat all the scraps.”

“That’s not what I meant!”

My apologies. I prostrated myself and apologized to Kuroha, who fumed at me with tears in her eyes. In the end, I wrote “LILSIS READ KANJI” on her back as usual. She critiqued my writing and content, and our session ended.

A few hours later.

I turned off the lights in my room, enveloping the room in darkness. Kuroha was sleeping next to me in bed. After our writing sessions, Kuroha would change into her pajamas, come back to my room, and end up falling asleep in my bed. Right now, her chest was rising and falling steadily as she quietly slept.

Kuroha would often sleep in my room after our “LILSIS READ KANJI” writing sessions. She claimed that it wasn’t on purpose, that she always accidentally fell asleep... But I couldn’t tell how much of that was true.

“...Nn...” she groaned, and I looked over at her. Her lips were slightly parted, defenseless. She looked so innocent. She would never show me this face while she was awake, so it tickled my instincts.

I couldn’t sleep, so I folded my hands behind my head and looked at the ceiling. While the rest of our family was gathered in the living room, us siblings hid in my room and played WRITE-ON-THE-BODY. And then we’d sleep in the same bed...

It was exciting, and also scary. I wondered if we really should be doing this...

Writing a novel with Kuroha wasn’t inherently a bad thing. I did think it was a little annoying when she complained about my writing, but lately she’d been more accepting of what I wrote. She would type what I wrote on the computer, so we did have a log of everything. The issue was how we kept it a secret from everyone else that I was writing on her skin. It was pretty crazy to serialize a novel on your little sister’s back... It may be fine within the fictional world of orthodox literature, but definitely not between real-life siblings.

I felt like if we continued this, we wouldn’t be able to maintain the relationship we had as siblings. I already knew how Kuroha felt about me to an extent, but she wouldn’t take the last step. As shameful as it was to admit, I was also being wishy-washy, and we hadn’t budged from the status quo for the past month.

I do like Kuroha, but... Yuzu-san’s gentle smile flashed through my mind. *Yuzu-san and Kuroha...* Their faces spun ’round and ’round in my head. What should I do...?

Kuroha murmured in a sleepy voice, “It’s your fault... Onii-chan...”

Wh-What’s my fault? My heart beat heavily in response to her words.

“Onii-chan...” Kuroha smiled, her eyes still closed. I hoped to hear some more of her thoughts when her defenses were down, but she didn’t say anything else.

I sighed, looking up at the ceiling. I didn’t know how much longer this situation would continue, but whatever would happen, would happen. I doubted that rushing to a conclusion would bring about a

good outcome. No one had a grudge against me right now, so I figured I would try going with the flow. For the time being, I would just continue writing the novel. Because that's what my cute little sister wanted me to do.

*

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LONG time no see. I am WRUR, the observer.

...It Seems that "The Great Father," Gin Imose, and Kuroha Imose have gotten so very CLose. He is writing a novel on her body every night.

Kyaah, I say. Kyaah. How INdecent.

Kuroha Imose seems to be super duper serious... LOVE is wonderful no matter the time period, so her love itself is not a bad thing.

The problem is "The Great Father's" novel. His first line tonight read "IMOKO-CHAN PANTIES THE BEST." There WERE no symbols, only hiragana and katakana. Unthinkable of "The Great Father" until now.

INdeed. Through the influence of Kuroha Imose, "The Great Father"'s novel has changed considerably.

...

Hmm. I will stop spectating now. IT is finally time for me to act, or else...

☆□ ♀ ∞ ◆▼▼

*

There's a type of person who tends to go at their own pace and throw off the people around them. Miru and Odaira-sensei are that type, and people say I sometimes act like that too. There's one other person I know who goes at their own pace: Professor Choumabayashi, the girl who's said to be the brains of Japan.

I woke up one morning to receive a small package from the professor without warning. The front of the package said "PRESENT☆" in big, bold letters.

A *present*...? It wasn't my birthday or anything, so I couldn't think of a reason why she'd send me a gift. As I was still pondering the situation, I received a call from the professor.

"Heyo, morning, Imose-kun. Did my box get delivered to you yet?"

"Yeah, it just did. What's inside? Is it something related to tentacles again?"

"Ahahah, that's not it-noda. But before we get to that, there's one

thing I want to ask... Imose-kun, how's your relationship been with Kuro-chan?"

"My relationship...? We're just siblings."

"Even though you've been doing *that* as her compromise?"

"Wha?! Why do you know about that...?"

"Ahahah, nothing escapes me-noda. So, how are things going with Kuro-chan?"

The professor seemed to know about our situation. Maybe Kuroha had been asking her for advice.

"I'm not sure what you're asking about exactly..."

"Spit it out already, you romance noob. Listen, Kuro-chan is waiting for you to make the big move, you know?"

"I-Is that so?"

"That's obvious! Night after night, she's being teased with just your fingertip... She might explode any day now-noda."

"Explode..."

The professor kept goading me on by saying I should satisfy her desires, grant her wishes, and stuff like that.

She seemed pretty enthusiastic. Why did she care so much about us? She was supposed to be completely devoted to 2D, so it was surprising for her to be interested in 3D, much less other people's relationships...

"Professor... Why are you encouraging Kuroha and I so much? It, well, seems like there's something you're not telling me..."

The professor fell silent at my question, then took a gulp of air. After another quiet moment...

"...It's about time I explained it to you-noda."

Huh? Her tone suddenly took a one-eighty. Her voice lowered. I could imagine a grave look on her face over the phone.

"...Imose-kun, why do you think I care so much about you two? That's because I think of Kuro-chan as my friend. And it's only natural for me to be worried about my friend's safety-noda."

"Safety?"

The next moment, the professor uttered something I couldn't believe. It was so absurd that I doubted my ears, but I knew that she wasn't joking. Her voice had a very uncharacteristic chill to it.

"If you don't get together with Kuro-chan, she'll be erased."

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, you know that legendary shopping site that has continued to operate for 200 years? Have you ever left a product review on that site?"

"No, I haven't."

“I was thinking I should leave a review sometime. For example... Like these.”

[A●AZON Reviews]

◆Review item: Macaron-print pencil case for young girls

Review by O

★★★★★

I bought this for my *gimai*, and apparently there was no one else in her class using such a cute pencil case. They all loved it and said it was super cute. She thanked me a lot and looked really happy. It's so popular among my sisters that they all have started fighting over it, so I'm going to buy 19 more☆

Review by H

★★★★☆

I bought this for my *jitsumai*, and she was so happy that she got tears in her eyes and blushed pink. We're blood-related siblings, so I know there's no future for us... And yet... I'm a little sad now, so I'm taking away one star.

◆Review item: Polka-dot print panties for young girls, set of two

Review by O

★★★★☆

They feel nice to wear and put on your head, but the colors are a little too mature, and the polka-dots are somewhat large. I wish they would put more thought into the design.

Review by H

★★☆☆☆

I heard these become slightly see-through when wet, so I was excited to pour water on them, yet they barely became see-through. Is this a defective product? I am offended.

◆Review item: LILSIS ☆ STAR by Gai Odaira

Review by O

★★★★★

As expected from the winner of the Homyura Prize. I was so moved that I peed myself 10 times. Anyone who refuses to read this work is unpatriotic.

Review by H

★☆☆☆☆

Anyone who would rate this 5 stars is related to the author. It's a piece of trash no matter how you look at it. For justice, I give this 1 star.

Also, I haven't read it yet.

◆Review item: Run, Melos by Osamu Dazai

Review by O

★★☆☆☆

It's a shame that the little sister Melos lives with is 16.

Review by H

★★☆☆☆

I agree with O's review.

“.....Those two sure have a lot of free time...”

Chapter 2: The Sun and the Moon

“Gin-san, wake up. You’re going to be late.”

“Nnn, five mor...min.....”

“Gin-san, I heard that you received an award for perfect attendance in elementary school. Please wake up, Gin-san!”

“...Nnn.”

“Geez... You leave me no choice. In that case...”

...Huh? I hear something rustling... What’s this sound...?

“...!” I hastily sat up.

The first thing I saw was Yuzu-san beaming as she was unfurling a rope.

“My, good morning, Gin-san. You were sleeping like a log, so I was about to have you play one of my brother’s favorite games, the Up-Down game.”

“That sounds wonderful. But I’m not so sure about doing that to someone in their sleep.”

“My brother loved exactly that. He asked me to do surprise attacks, so sometimes I would sneak into his room in the middle of the night, string him up, and leave him hanging out the window. He would tell me, ‘I dreamt that I was surrounded by sadistic girls who were all looking down at me with disdain, I wonder why?’”

“I see, so he could go to heaven in his sleep.”

I was happy to hear about their brother-sister relationship. Yuzu-san’s joy brought a smile to my face as well, but it was short-lived as I immediately tensed up.

...After Kuroha finished transcribing last night’s “LILSIS READ KANJI,” she had fallen asleep in my bed... By the time I had fallen asleep, Kuroha was still sleeping beside me. *But then, where is she now?*

“K-Kuroha—” I promptly looked to my side, but no one was there. *Phew. I see, Kuroha returned to her room before I woke up.*

“Oh, what is it about Kuroha-san?”

“Oh, no, it’s nothing. I’m still half-asleep, and remembered seeing Kuroha in my dream.”

“Oh my... Did I appear in your dream?” asked Yuzu-san with a tinge of jealousy.

“Huh? No, just Kuroha.”

Yuzu-san pouted ever so slightly...

“I’ll make sure to dream about you tonight, Yuzu-san!”

“Yes, please do!” she smiled. Then she said, “I’ll make breakfast now,” and turned around to go to the kitchen on the first floor. However, she stopped right before the door. I looked at her, wondering what she would say.

“Um, Gin-san...” Yuzu-san turned back to look at me. “Are you... hiding anything from me?”

I gulped. The first thing that popped into my head was...

“If you don’t get together with Kuro-chan, she’ll be erased.”

Yesterday morning, the professor revealed something shocking to me about Kuroha. Not only did it involve Kuroha, but Yuzu-san as well. So yes, I was indeed hiding something from her... But Yuzu’s idea of “hiding” wasn’t that.

“You’ve been working very hard at your novel lately. Are you planning on submitting your book for the Newcomer’s Prize in secret? I’ve been wondering about that, but you’ve always had the ‘WRITING NOW DONT BOTHER ME’ sign hanging on your door, so I felt I couldn’t ask...”

I gulped again. Yeah, there was that too—the fact that I was writing “LILSIS READ KANJI” with Kuroha in secret. Both my conversation with the professor and “LILSIS READ KANJI”... I was hiding two things from Yuzu-san. It pained me to do so, but I had to keep both a secret.

“I’m not planning to submit it without telling you. I’ve just been having trouble wrapping up the story.”

“Is that so? Um... I may not be of much help, but if there’s anything I can do for you, please don’t hesitate to ask. I’d be happy to make you a midnight snack, or read the manuscript and give you my thoughts.”

It seemed like Yuzu-san really wanted to do something for me... *Sigh.* I felt guilty pangs in my chest. *I’m really sorry, Yuzu-san...*

“I’ll be waiting downstairs after I make your breakfast. Once you finish eating, let’s all go to school together with Kuroha-san.” Yuzu-san smiled as she left my room.

Yuzu-san. I’ll make sure to tell you the truth one day. I really do want to tell you everything. So for now, forgive me for keeping this a secret.

It wasn’t something I could talk about without a plan. If I let something slip and it spread, it might have colossal effects...

I thought back to yesterday morning. The professor’s words were shocking.

.....—

“...The Pantyhose Party is targeting Kuroha?”

Those were the professor's words, which I repeated in confusion.

"What's the Pantyhose Party? A group of people who love pantyhose?"

Anyone would assume that at first. I imagined a group of loveable old men dancing around wearing pantyhose on their heads.

"The Pantyhose Party is a pantyhose-shaped lifeform. They came here from the future-noda."

"Professor... It's true that the main character in my novel is a pair of pantyhose, but that's just a fictional story. You should know I wouldn't believe crazy talk like that!" I chuckled, but my opinion would completely change within the next minute. Because I would soon have my memories restored.

The professor had sent me a pair of girl's panties.

"Those panties are made with Anti-Pantyhose Party powers-noda. It'll protect you from their interference and free you from their memory manipulation effects-noda. First, try putting it on your head-noda."

"Uh-huh..."

The professor was acting surprisingly serious, so I did as she told me and put the panties on my head. In the next moment, all the memories that had been sealed by the Pantyhose Party came flooding back.

"...?!"

The time WRUR Pantyhose-san appeared right when Kuroha said that she loved me. The time RBUR Pantyhose-san, the prime minister of Japan from the future, appeared in our hotel room when we went to the beach. The time they explained how my novel caused the birth of the Pantyhose Party and the language of the future, ○(Earsh). The time Amaneko-chan's body got erased, and I became enraged.

"Have you remembered?"

"...Yeah..."

The Pantyhose Party—the strange beings that ruled over the world of the 38th century.

They really did exist, and they'd come to our time...

"I remember now. But why are they going after Kuroha?!"

"...About that. I'm really sorry-noda. It's all because I was too rash-noda."

The professor had used the time-traveling marshmallows to go to the future several times.

"I accepted the world of the future at first-noda. When we were arguing with Aniki, I even used the Japanese of the future as an example to persuade him-noda."

However, after traveling to the future again and again, she noticed that a certain "something" she loved had vanished in the

future.

That something was 2D culture. The professor lived for anime and games, so much so that she became a scientist to discover how to travel to the 2nd dimension. So of course, she had the following thought:

“I wanted to figure out a way to let 2D culture survive in the future.”

“And what does that have to do with Kuroha being targeted?”

“To make 2D culture survive, I thought that we needed to erase the future where the Pantyhose Party came into existence-noda. Do you know why they were born in the first place?”

“...Because of my novel.”

“That’s right-noda. So I figured that if I helped realize my friend’s crush, that would also influence your novel. Two birds with one stone-noda.”

“...You were the one who pushed her, right? To start getting closer to me.”

Under Kuroha’s influence, my novel would change, and the future would also change as a result. The professor’s plan seemed to be on the mark—the future was apparently already close to changing.

“Let me ask one more time. Why is Kuroha being targeted?”

“Kuroha has been deemed a threat that could cause the future to change. The ‘transformation’ of history isn’t set in stone yet, but the probability is increasing. The Pantyhose Party is focused on keeping history on the ‘right path,’ so they could no longer leave her be-noda.”

I raised my voice.

“Seriously?! Kuroha didn’t do anything wrong! And yet they’re targeting her... That’s just wrong! It’s not fair! Is there anything we can do?!”

“Sorry... I also didn’t think it would come to this-noda. But now that it has, we need to do everything we can to protect Kuro-chan. And there’s only one way to do that. One method to ‘lock down’ the changing of the future-noda.”

“...And will that save Kuroha?”

“Yes. The future will change, and the Pantyhose Party will disappear-noda.”

But what’s the method to “lock down” the changing of the future? I was about to ask, but then thought of something. The professor had said:

“If you don’t get together with Kuro-chan, she’ll be erased.”

In other words... If Kuroha and I got together, it would “lock down” the changing of the future, the Pantyhose Party would

disappear, and Kuroha would be safe... But on the other hand, if the future didn't change, Kuroha would remain in danger, and might even be erased...

"I know what you're thinking. You just need to get together with her-noda."

"When you say 'get together,' what exactly do you mean?"

"That's obvious-noda. You and Kuro-chan need to physically do the deed."

I almost dropped my phone.

"Wh-What?! ...How would something like that make the future change? I don't believe it! So if I did that with Odaira-sensei (girl), would it lock down the future where Sensei and I get together? I do like blonde hair and look up to Sensei, but that's impossible!"

"You just said 'impossible' about Odaira-sensei, right? That's where the difference is-noda. It's 'possible' with Kuro-chan, right?"

"...Romantically speaking, it might be."

The professor compared it to a game. It wasn't possible to unlock Sensei's route, but it was possible to unlock Kuroha's route. Through my actions, I had to "lock down" her route as soon as possible. She said that there was more to it, but explaining more would just make me confused.

"...I think I understand now, but... That doesn't mean we have to physically get together, right? I just need to have a strong enough will."

"That's too vague-noda. To 'lock down' the future, you need to do it in an easy to understand way-noda. With your personality, Imose-kun, if you got that far with a girl, you'd probably dedicate yourself to her for the rest of your life."

"...Am I that single-minded?"

"That's how the story has been passed down in the future."

I still had my doubts, but the professor seemed convinced. Our conversation had taken a lot of turns, but to summarize the important bits:

1. Kuroha was being targeted by the Pantyhose Party, beings from the future.
2. To protect Kuroha, we had to "lock down" a future where the Pantyhose Party didn't exist.
3. To do that, the professor said that Kuroha and I had to physically get together.

I still had a lot of questions. Should I keep this a secret from

Kuroha or anyone else I knew? To change the future, wouldn't I just need to change the content of my novel? Is this all even real in the first place...?

The professor said that Kuroha was being targeted, but there was no proof. This could be the professor's idea of some epic, once-in-a-lifetime joke.

But I figured I should believe it for now. If it was only the professor's words I probably wouldn't have, but there were also my unsealed memories, and the Anti-Pantyhose Party invention she had given me. The Pantyhose Party really existed, and the professor invented a tool to deal with them. I couldn't just dismiss all of this as a lie or a joke...

So now, my responsibility was to protect Kuroha. *Right. I've got to do everything I can to protect Kuroha because she's my precious little sister.*

But, well... I didn't think I could immediately go and do *that* with her...

“...Do you have anything else you want to ask, Imose-kun?”

I thought for a moment. *Hmm, there is something I am curious about.*

“According to your explanation, if we went down the ‘right path’ of history, would I get together with someone other than Kuroha? If so, who would it be?”

“Do you want to know? Who do you think? Try thinking of anyone who comes to mind-noda.”

The first people who came to mind were... Yuzu-san. Amaneko-chan. And unexpectedly, the professor.

“...I thought of these three, is the answer among them?”

“...It is.”

“Wh-Who?!”

The professor gave a vigorous sigh, then exclaimed,

“It's—”



—.....

My ordinary days were apparently about to become unordinary. The forces of evil were going to invade from far away any time now.

I say “apparently,” because my daily life was as peaceful as it ever was. The Pantyhose Party had yet to reveal themselves. I mean, I was worried and on edge after being told all that, but there was no actual danger I could see with my own eyes, so I hadn’t taken any definitive actions yet. Right, I hadn’t done anything yet...

“...? What is it, Onii-chan? Is my hair sticking up?”

“Oh, n-no.”

I had been captivated by Kuroha’s back as she put on her shoes before we went to school.

I had been captivated. By my very own sister, Kuroha.

“Wh-What is it...? You look different from usual.”

She squinted at me suspiciously, and looked more sensual than usual doing so... I couldn’t help it. After being told to physically get together with Kuroha, there was no way I could avoid seeing her differently.

On that note, I had gotten too shaken up yesterday and sent the professor an email that evening.

“Imose-kun, what’s up with that email you just sent me? ‘𐄂 “ ●●
▽△ ’... I’m not *Jitsumai*-chan, I can’t understand this long string of symbols-noda.”

“About that... It’s an important thing regarding getting together physically... All the symbols are two shapes overlapping. That’s the symbolism I wanted to convey.”

“...This incident was my fault, so I’ll do everything I can to help Kuro-chan, but I’m still a busy person...”

“Then let me ask directly! When Kuroha and I get together, does the position matter?”

“...Are these symbols different physical positions?”

“Yes.”

“...”

“...”

“I’m a fair lady, but... do you mind if I murder you?”

“Gyaah, that would change history.”

She coldly hung up on me.

After that, I sent Amaneko-chan the same email on a whim, and she got really excited in her replies. Amaneko-chan loved these sorts of conversations.

...Let me get back on topic.

The professor had said all that, but it wasn’t definite that committing that act with Kuroha would change the future, and our

relationship hadn't advanced to the point that we could do it just like that. So I remained on guard to protect Kuroha against the Pantyhose Party, but still continued going about my everyday life.

The place I spent most of the hours of my day was school. Now that summer break had ended and the new school semester had started, my school commute had added a heaping helping of brilliance. That's because *she* was walking next to me, giving off her positively beaming aura.

"Missionary, maybe..."

"My, Gin-san. You've been mumbling about missions in the navy a lot a lot, are you interested in the military? My brother also loved women in military uniforms. He especially worshiped the holy trinity of the 'military uniform,' 'eyepatch,' and 'whip,' and even snuck into Yokota Air Base, where he was beaten to a pulp to set an example."

"I admire your brother's sincere conviction. His existence itself should be an example for the nation of Japan."

"I have no idea what you're saying, Onii-chan..." sighed Kuroha, who was walking beside us.

Yuzu-san had entered the same school as Kuroha and I. She was coincidentally assigned to the same class as Kuroha, first-year Δ class. That should have been a good thing for Kuroha, who had few friends, but...

"....."

I couldn't avoid thinking about it. Over summer break, Kuroha had told me that she loved me, and Yuzu-san had confessed to me as well.

Kuroha and I had started having those secret meetings, and my parents assumed that Yuzu-san and I were engaged. Kuroha was definitely keeping an eye on Yuzu-san, and I bet Yuzu-san was keeping Kuroha in mind to some degree as well.

On the surface, they got along just fine. In front of me, they never seemed nervous, and our relationship remained the same. I'd heard that girls were better at keeping up appearances than boys, but even so, I couldn't detect a hint of awkwardness from them.

That was only on the surface, though. On the inside, they probably had mixed feelings for each other, and it might just be a ticking time-bomb waiting to go off...

"Kuroha-san, I made pepes for today's lunch. Let's eat it together."

"...S-Sure. I've never heard of that before. You sure do have a large cooking repertoire."

...Well, in any case, they were getting along right now. They were smiling at each other with no sign of any tension between them. They were both kind people, so there was nothing to worry about, I thought.

However, I was being made keenly aware of just how much I didn't know about the world yet. My thought process wasn't wrong, but... Between the two of them, there was a much larger force at play.

Lately, I'd been going to first-year Δ class often during lunch. Not only was Kuroha there, but now Yuzu-san as well.

After showing my face in that class so many times, I'd become a bit famous there, and you'd think the other students would casually greet me... But instead, they'd step out of the way when they saw me.

Kuroha said that I had an atmosphere which made other people want to step aside. *Stop with the compliments, you're making me blush.*

Anyway, where's Kuroha and Yuzu-san? I looked inside the classroom, and the first thing I noticed was Yuzu-san sitting in the center of the room. A bunch of students were surrounding her to the point that you could barely see her face, but even so, she had enough presence to pull you in with just a glance.

Yuzu-san had always been beautiful enough to draw other people's attention, but in the past month, she had leveled up even more. Part of it was my mom teaching her 23rd century makeup, but there was a feeling of contentment radiating from within her, and it made her entire body glow.

If I were to compare her to something... it'd be the sun.

"...?!"

What surprised me was how many boys were praying to her from a distance. In this day and age, the normal thing for people to pray to were panties. Yuzu-san was deified enough in this class to rival even panties. On top of that, the people idolizing Yuzu-san weren't just boys.

"Mirokuin-san, about the 'tortoise shell bondage $\omega\gamma$ ' you taught me the other day. I tried it on my brother and he fainted, and sometimes his heart stopped beating. What should I do about that?"

"Use electric shocks, of course. My brother also loved electric shocks."

"I see. What should I do if the electric shocks make his heart stop beating entirely?"

"Oh my. If that happens, I suggest trying to bury him underground."

From the cute girls talk, you could tell that Yuzu-san was also popular among the girls. Even though she had just come here from 200 years ago, she had already gotten used to our time period, and easily mingled with the rest of the class... She had incredible adaptability and social skills.

People would address Yuzu-san without her doing anything. I could understand why—she had an approachable, friendly

atmosphere. If others saw someone talking to Yuzu-san, they'd have an easier time talking to her too, and it created a domino effect. I kept watching Yuzu-san, then heard a familiar voice.

"Mirokuin-san... Let's hang out together sometime."

"Yeah! I'd like to talk about romance with you."

Huh? Those two were Kuroha's friends—the out-of-it-looking girl with glasses and the energetic girl with short hair. The glasses girl had gone out together with Kuroha on a day off, and the short-haired girl had consulted with Kuroha about love advice before. They had both become friends with Kuroha, who'd always been difficult to get along with.

But now they were both acting like Yuzu-san's lackeys...

Come to think of it, where was Kuroha? She wasn't near Yuzu-san, so I looked around and—

"...Come on..."

Kuroha was sitting by the window reading a book. The cover had kanji on it, so it was probably a modern literature book. She was reading it for leisure, not for her translation work. The book rested on her desk, her face was pointed slightly downwards, and she silently turned each page. I couldn't tell what sort of expression she was making... I was about to call out to her, but then she suddenly raised her head and looked over at Yuzu-san. Her gaze lingered for a few seconds and then turned back downwards, looking somewhat sullen as if she were thinking about something.

"..."

She quickly returned to her aloof expression and continued reading, but... I could see her true emotions for just a second there. I looked between Yuzu-san, who was surrounded by liveliness, and Kuroha, who was silent and still.

Geez... what polar opposites. Yuzu-san had definitely not taken Kuroha's friends on purpose. People were just naturally drawn to warmth.

Yuzu-san, who drew people to her.

Kuroha, who was always alone.

Light and shade. The haves and have-nots.

...The sun and the moon.

After Kuroha became set to debut as a translator, she started getting along with her class more. But I guess as long as her core personality didn't change, it didn't make a big difference in the end... *Now which of the two should I approach?* That was—

"Gin-san!"

I was about to step forward, but then stopped.

"My, are you here already? I made lunch today, so let's eat

together,” Yuzu-san smiled happily as she held up her lunch bag to chest height and walked over to me.

Her group followed and approached me.

“Hey, that’s... Imose-san’s brother and Mirokuin-san’s... boyfriend.”

I heard some murmurs.

“...O-Oh no, that’s a misunderstanding. Gin-san and I are, well...”
Yuzu-san turned red as she tried to deny them.

I also said, “We’re not like that.” If I denied them too strongly, it might hurt Yuzu-san, so I added something along the lines of “I’m not worthy of her.”

The group surrounded Yuzu-san and I and asked us a bunch of questions. Some people who’d never talked to me before were actually happily chatting with me now. *This girl used to completely ignore me if we passed each other in the hallway...* I guess this was the power of Yuzu-san. As long as she was with me, even I would gain new acquaintances.

I ended up staring at Yuzu-san.

“...? What’s wrong, Gin-san? Are you that hungry?”

“Oh no, it’s nothing.”

The longer I looked at Yuzu-san’s beauty, the more my chest grew hot. Something welled up inside me. Yuzu-san was the model behind my first love, the character Homyura Taitei. She had also written “*Ani MAJI Mania*,” the book that *Oniaka* was based on.

With that in mind, I felt like we shared a fate too profound to express in words... But apparently, she did in fact share a fate with me. Because according to the professor, in the ‘right path’ of history...

I would end up choosing Yuzu-san.

I had married Yuzu-san, had many kids together, and we had lived happily ever after. I could choose Yuzu-san after learning all this. And I didn’t think that would be the wrong choice.

But now it was no longer so simple. Kuroha had been deemed a threat by the Pantyhose Party. As long as they existed, Kuroha was in danger. The ‘right history’ involved the Pantyhose Party remaining in existence...

.....

“...Oh.”

“Oh.”

Our eyes met.

Yuzu-san had cooked enough to fill three lunchboxes. One for me, one for Yuzu-san, and one for...

“Kuroha.”

“Kuroha-san.”

Both of us looked over at the window seat.

...But Kuroha wasn't there.

*

* * * —※■●□ 2 3 ★☆▼▼ — * * *

Kuroha Imose.

DOn't hold it against me. WE can no longer remain ON standby.

.....

.....

.....

...

HUh? This is strange. WHat is the meaning OF this? There should be nothing WRong with my mind control methods, BUt...

...!

.....

I SEe, is that how it is?

I was NOt expecting them TO set this trap!

THis is BAd! I MUst get away fast!

Ahh! U-UWah!

...KYAAaaaaaAHHhh.

☆□♀∞◆▼▼

*

I thought my heart would stop. The Pantyhose Party was after Kuroha now. I assumed they'd done something to her since she vanished as soon as I took my eyes off her. I looked for Kuroha all throughout lunch, but never found her. I'd panicked, but I heard she'd returned to the classroom right before afternoon classes started.

Later that day, I asked her where she went, and she answered, “My stomach hurt, so I was in the bathroom,” but... I couldn't tell if that was the truth. “Can I make sure by checking the stall you were in?” I asked, and then she sent me to the world of the stars using the dictionary in her hand.

That night, it was time for our nightly “LILSIS READ KANJI” writing session. I sat on the floor of my room waiting for Kuroha, but she still hadn't arrived. She would usually be here by now... Did

something happen?

“...Ahh!” I had a sudden realization, and felt like my pupils dilated. *Is she not here because the Pantyhose Party did something to her?* They had the power to manipulate physical bodies and make someone disappear...

“Kuroha!” I bolted to my feet, ran to Kuroha’s room down the hall, and found the sign “TRANSLATING NOW DONT BOTHER ME” on her door.

Was she really translating? If so, I shouldn’t interrupt her, but... There was no time for that! I hastily knocked on her door. Then, from inside,

“...Onii-chan?”

“Wh-What, so you’re in there after all...”

I felt relief as the weight lifted off my chest.

“Kuroha, it’s me. Are we going to have our session today? If not, that’s okay, but can you tell me about it first? I’m, well... waiting.”

“...”

I heard hesitant shuffling beyond the door.

“You’re right, Onii-chan. This was my idea, so it’d be selfish for me to skip out on it...”

Her voice sounded sullen, and then the door opened. Past the half-opened door was Kuroha in her pajamas looking downcast.

“Today... let’s do it in my room. Come inside.”

She invited me into her room. Just in case, I looked around inside, but nothing in particular had changed. It was her usual neat and tidy room.

“...”

Kuroha sat down on the bed, but looked at the wall instead of facing me. Her eyes were vacant, and her expression in general felt gloomy. She didn’t seem thoroughly depressed, but if you were to ask if she needed some cheering up right now or not, it was clearly the former.

“Um... You don’t have to force yourself.”

“No... let’s start.”

Kuroha lied face-down on the bed and revealed her back. I wasn’t sure how to react to her looking so glum, but she asked me to start, so... I sat down next to her and began to write. I wrote down all the events that happened today, starting from the morning, on her back. We went to school, had class, and while I was talking with Yuzu-san during lunch, Kuroha vanished before I realized...

“...Hey, Onii-chan...”

“Hm?”

“...”

“What’s up?”

Kuroha seemed hesitant, but then said, “...Can you hear me out?”

“Yeah, sure.” I lifted my finger and pulled down her pajamas. Then I lied on my stomach next to her.

“You know... I think it’s dumb that people have the habit of thinking about the future. I mean, we don’t know what’s going to happen. But I also think it can’t be helped that people try to imagine all sorts of things about their future selves.”

She sure is beating around the bush, but I think she’s trying to say that she wants to talk about the future?

“Wh-What I’m about to say is just in general terms. It’s not about me or anyone in particular, so just keep that in mind.”

“Got it. Just in general terms.”

“Yeah. So... If you have a kid, you’d take them to the park or something, right? And if the mother is a sociable person, her kid would have an easier time making friends with the other kids. If the mother is shy, the kid might also have trouble talking with the other children.”

“You think? I think it depends on the kid’s personality... Like even if the mom is sociable, if the kid is shy, then they’d have trouble making friends anyway,” I responded candidly.

“Are you thinking of me when I was a kid?” she answered dejectedly.

“Huh? ...Ah, no, I wasn’t! I wasn’t thinking about anyone in particular.”

“...Then that’s fine.” Kuroha gathered her thoughts and continued.

“I think a mother has a strong influence on her child. Children are important to both sides of a married couple, so I think having an antisocial wife would be a minus for the husband, too...”

I was surprised.

“I didn’t expect you to think about the future so realistically, Kuroha...”

“...I-I said it wasn’t about me or anyone in particular! I’m just speaking in general, don’t get the wrong idea,” she shook her head, then continued.

“So... Would it be better to have a cheery, sociable wife...?”

She said it casually, as if she wanted to convey that this wasn’t a huge concern for her. If she had prefaced her question with “Onii-chan,” I might have given it a little more thought before telling her my answer. But she had said it was in general terms, so I answered without much thought.

“Yeah, I guess that would be better.”

“.....” Kuroha’s face was promptly colored in shock.

“...I guess that’s how it is, huh...”

She quickly grew more and more despondent. It was like watching a flower wither on fast-forward.

“Why... are we so different...”

It was a tiny, hushed voice, but I could pick out her words. Hearing that, I realized I had chosen the wrong answer.

Damn it... I would've realized if I'd just thought about it a little!

Kuroha said it was in general terms, but she really was talking about herself.

The “antisocial wife” was Kuroha, and the “bright and cheerful wife” was probably referring to Yuzu-san...

Yuzu-san was in our house. And now also at school.

The sun known as Yuzu-san was gradually rising in every aspect of Kuroha's life. If the sun began shining its warm light on everything around it... The moon would have no choice but to hide.

And then, what would the moon think? It might want to find just one thing to cling on to. For Kuroha, that “one thing” might be...

Maybe I was thinking too highly of myself, but wouldn't it be the time she spent with me? The time we spent writing this novel together? That's what I had thought, but then Kuroha said something unexpected.

“Onii-chan, I've given this a lot of thought... If you want to write ‘LILSIS READ KANJI’ on a computer like normal, I think that's fine. So don't hold yourself back.”

Kuroha had never suggested that we stop writing “LILSIS READ KANJI” in secret until now...

She looked at the wall, still lying down, and didn't face me. *I see now...* Yuzu-san's presence had been worrying Kuroha this much.

Yuzu-san had the support of our parents, and got along well with everyone around her. It was obvious that she would think that Yuzu-san was a better fit for me than her.

But!

“Listen, Kuroha. This is just me talking to myself. You can take it however you want.”

“.....”

“I think everyone is human. They all have their own warmth, and just like how some people bring happiness to everyone around them, there are others who focus it all on one spot like a magnifying glass burning the concrete.”

“What do you mean, all in one spot...? I don't get it.”

“I mean that it's fine to focus all your warmth on just one person, and not give it to anyone else.”

“...”

“I think they both have their good points, and neither one ranks above the other.”

“...”

What I'm trying to say is that you have your good points too, Kuroha. I think you're plenty charming on your own, so don't feel so inferior about yourself.

Kuroha remained silent, taking in my words.

"...Honestly, for you to say all that is a real stretch for your character..."

"*Stretched character?* Are you talking about when your panties wear out?"

"...Geez." Kuroha looked at me. She seemed a little shy and embarrassed. Her distinct, almond-shaped eyes stared right at me, and I could tell they were a little damp.

"Hey, Onii-chan." Kuroha looked at the wall again and raised up her pajamas, suddenly revealing her white back to me. That surprise attack sent a shock through me, it was bad for my heart.

"I know I just said all that, but, um, well..." Kuroha mumbled in a timid voice. She seemed like she was fidgeting... "I... don't want to stop, after all...."

"Yeah..."

We had started these secret nightly sessions at Kuroha's suggestion. I had been wary of many things—if we really should be doing this, or if we should be hiding things from our family.

Right now, some of those thoughts were still lurking in my head. But looking at Kuroha now, as anxious as she had become, I really felt like her big brother. If this time we shared was the "one thing" she wanted to cling on to, I wanted to welcome it with all my heart. That, and...

"Alright, Onii-chan. We stopped in the middle, so let's continue now."

I traced my finger on Kuroha's back while thinking, that, and my views on "LILSIS READ KANJI" were gradually changing. It originally started as a personal experience diary after we'd traveled to the 21st century, and back then it only belonged to me. *But now that it has the title of "LILSIS READ KANJI," and now that I'm writing it on your body, it no longer belongs just to me. This is a creation by both you and me.*

Right. A work between us siblings.

After I finished writing, I decided to go back to my room. Kuroha looked dejected for a moment, but she didn't say anything. It looked like we'd be sleeping in different rooms tonight.

Kuroha was apparently being targeted by the Pantyhose Party, but as long as we had *that* item from the professor, she should be safe.

I smiled, said good night, and turned to the door. I left behind a warm atmosphere, but my expression turned serious as I faced the door.

Should I tell Kuroha what I'd heard from the professor? She had told me not to say anything. I had been constantly worrying about this since finding out, but seeing how she had acted today... I did think it'd be bad to tell her...

Our parents would be against us getting together, and Kuroha became conflicted by just seeing Yuzu-san in class. Considering how delicate her emotions were now, if I told her that I ended up together with Yuzu-san in the “right” history, she would 100% back down from me. And then the future wouldn't change, and the Pantyhose Party would continue to exist. As a result, Kuroha would continue to be targeted. Even if she chose to step down on her own, she would always be perceived as a threat.

I wanted to make sure one more time—Should I tell Kuroha what I learned from the professor?

The answer was no.

It would be bad to tell her.

In order to protect her, I had to resolve this in secret.

And then, right as I was about to walk out of her room.

“...Hm?”

I saw a crumpled pair of black pantyhose wadded up under Kuroha's desk. It wasn't like the tidy Kuroha to leave a pair of worn pantyhose out like that. I bet she hadn't noticed, since it was out of sight under her desk.

It was a family tradition for all women of the Imose household to wear black pantyhose after they turned 15. It was passed down through the generations, but I didn't know where this tradition came from. Someone had likely propagated it at some point in time. Probably a thoroughbred pantyhose maniac.

I figured I would clean it up for her, and so I picked up the pantyhose—

《Gyaaahhh. Help meeeee.》

...?!

A piercing woman's voice echoed in my head. I quickly turned back to Kuroha. She was already ready to sleep, lying in bed with the sheets over her. That was a loud voice, but she didn't appear to have heard it at all.

Was I the only one who heard it...? If so, this black pantyhose was...
“!”

I hastily grabbed the pantyhose and ran to my room. My heart was pounding rapidly.

—*It worked!*

Professor, professor! The Pantyhose Party fell for your trap perfectly!

I had been relatively calm despite knowing that Kuroha was being targeted by the Pantyhose Party. That was because Kuroha was already being protected by one of the professor's inventions.

It was the Anti-Pantyhose Party panties. I had given them to Kuroha, saying it was a gift from me.

After wearing it once, if the Pantyhose Party tried to manipulate your memories or control your body, it would activate and seal their powers.

After I returned to my room, I took out my phone and called the professor.

"Hello, Professor? I caught one of the Pantyhose Party! What should I do next—"

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Odaira-sensei wrote a story with a little sister giving birth in this month's *Literary Gal*!"

"G-Giving birth?! I expect nothing but the worst from this..."

"He said the idea came to mind when he was walking down the street. Inspiration can come from anywhere."

Special Issue *Literary Gal* September 2202

"MY BABY" by Odaira Gai

COMES IN → VENDING MACHINE (LILSIS)

COMES IN → CUSTOMER (ONII-CHAN)

CUSTOMER: IT COLD WANT HOT COFFEE

CLINK☆

COIN GOES IN

VENDING MACHINE: N-NOOO ONII-NYAN IT WONT FIT

CUSTOMER: ONE MORE COIN

CLINK☆

VENDING MACHINE: AHHH I SAID IT WONT FIT

CUSTOMER HIT HOT COFFEE BUTTON

VENDING MACHINE: AHHH YOU'LL MAKE ME GIVE BIRTH! GIVE BIRTH!

RATTLE ROLL ROLL

COFFEE COMES OUT

VENDING MACHINE SPACED OUT

VENDING MACHINE: AHN I GAVE BIRTH ← HAPPY◎

CUSTOMER LEAVES

VENDING MACHINE: I WANT TO HAVE ONII-CHANS CHILD MORE!

“.....Th-The heck is this? What awful taste.”

“How profound. ‘I want to have Onii-chan’s child’... It’s so subtle, but it’s paying respect to that legendary novel!”

“What do you mean, subtle? It’s written right there...”

“What Sensei is trying to convey here is the importance of having children and passing culture down to them. There’s no other way to interpret this.”

“...I guess diehard fans will find their happiness in the strangest places...”

Chapter 3: Onii-chan!

The Pantyhose Party were the rulers of the future. The confusing part about that name was that “Party” referred to both their species and the political party that they belonged to, since there were also government bodies in the future. They must have really wanted to make that Pansutou (パンス党) pun.

As the translator, I feel this needs some further explanation! Pantyhose in Japanese is Pansuto, a shortened form of “panty-stocking”. The 党 kanji, pronounced “tou,” is a suffix for ‘political party.’ Hence, the incredibly clever and completely impossible to fully translate, Pansutou, aka Pantyhose Party.

Of course, this name was a rough translation to our current-day language. In the language of the future, ○(Earsh), it would be written using symbols like “■=” or “▶=.”

The Pantyhose Party apparently also had a religion. It was called Flat Chestianity (ヒンヌー教). Why did they have to turn everything into an exhausting pun?

As the translator, I will refrain from comment.

They were not a naturally evolved species, but an artificial lifeform created by scientists from the future. At first, they were manually crafted by humans, but the Pantyhose Party eventually developed their own manufacturing technology and began making more of themselves (or rather birthing themselves) from a special textile mill.

Their appearance and touch were no different from the pantyhose I knew. If I pulled at their cloth with my fingers, they’d give me a springy stretch.

Let me repeat: The Pantyhose Party were the rulers of the future... But if you sealed their powers, they were no different from ordinary pantyhose. Right now in front of me, the professor was excitedly messing around with one of them.

“Ahahah, it really is no different from a normal pantyhose-noda. Take that, and that!”

《No, don’t, don’t touch meeeeeeee! This is textile assault!》

The professor’s laboratory was in Kanda, Tokyo. The professor and I were in the guest room, along with a restrained WRUR Pantyhose-san, who I was now meeting for the third time. The professor was

poking and pulling at WRUR Pantyhose-san on the table.

I had come here to discuss our next plan of action... But being a scientist, I guess the professor's sense of curiosity had won her over, and she was currently absorbed in toying with the freshly captured WRUR-san.

"Right now, this thing's nothing more than a measly pantyhose who can communicate by telepathy-noda."

Thanks to the effect of the panties, WRUR-san had lost most of her powers. She couldn't talk out loud or move now, much less alter memories or travel through time. However, there was just one power that remained—"contact communication." This let her communicate telepathically with anyone she'd been in physical contact with as long as they were within a radius of a few meters. The reason I could hear WRUR-san's voice, but Kuroha couldn't, was because only I had touched her. We couldn't seal this power because it was the most basic power for their species, or something like that. It was too complicated for me to understand.

"Professor, sorry to interrupt while you're playing with WRUR-san, but I don't think this is the best time. What should our next move be?"

The wheels of fate had started to turn. We may have been protected by the panties at that moment, but that didn't change the fact that Kuroha was in danger. We had to do something.

"You say that like there's a choice? The only thing left to do is create a future where these guys don't exist-noda. And to do that, you just need to hurry up and screw Kuro-chan. That'll 'lock down' a different future."

"S-Screw...? That's a blunt way of putting it."

"Actually, I've been wanting to ask. Why haven't you gone all the way with Kuro-chan? It sounds like you haven't made any progress-noda."

"That's..."

"Is it Yuzu-cci? Are you worried about the 'correct path' of history?"

Bullseye. I had to protect Kuroha. But I was also worried about Yuzu-san, who I would have ended up with on the "correct path" of history.

If I was forced to admit it, my feelings had yet to completely sway toward Kuroha or Yuzu-san. I definitely had a more intimate relationship with Kuroha right now, and she was dear to me, but I couldn't get Yuzu-san off my mind either.

She'd had a complicated upbringing and bore a lot on her shoulders, though she might not show it. She had traveled all the way to this century by herself and was working so hard... I wanted her to

be happy.

“So you can’t decide? What a lucky problem to have-noda,” the professor sighed sarcastically. I got where she was coming from, but this really was a problem for me... That, and something had been on my mind ever since this started. I bet anyone would have had this question...

“...If we want to change the future, can’t I just change the content of my novel?”

“Perhaps. But in that case, it would take longer to ‘lock down’ a different future-noda. There’s no guarantee that you’d be able to write a different novel, after all. If you get into an actual relationship with Kuro-chan, that would be a powerful factor that would speed up ‘locking down’ the change in the future.”

I knew that the professor’s words were just a hypothesis. There was a chance that nothing would change even if Kuroha and I really did take that step. But right now, there was nothing I could do but trust the professor’s words. I had nothing else to fall back on.

“Anyway, just hurry up and make a decision-noda. These things will disappear as soon as you do it with Kuro-chan,” said the professor, picking up WRUR-san. *Gyaaah, stooooop*, she wailed.

I had come here to consult with the professor about our next move, but I guess it was up to me in the end...

“I got it...” I nodded. And then—

Ding-dong, the doorbell chimed.

“Oh, she’s here.”

“...Who?”

“I bet it’s a cute girl-noda,” the professor said confidently, then went to the front door. Soon after, a high-pitched voice rang from the entryway. Then the professor, along with a cute girl with her hair up in a springy side-tail, came back to the guest room. It was my *jitsumai*

“Nii-sama!”

Amaneko-chan.

It seemed that the professor and Amaneko-chan had become close enough to talk with each other once in a while. Amaneko-chan said they got along because “she didn’t defile Nii-sama with her eyes,” unlike Kuroha or Yuzu-san.

“Though I want Nii-sama to hurry up and defile me-nodesu...”

She’d heard that I was coming to the professor’s lab today and rushed over here as soon as she could.

“Professor, here’s your gift-nodesu!”

“Oh, just what I’d asked for!”

“Yes! I want to try it later, since Nii-sama is here and all-nodesu.”

Amaneko-chan handed the professor a paper bag. The two of them smirked at me... What was going on?

To be honest, I was worried about Kuroha right now and wasn't in the mood to play and chat. I was feeling restless, like I had to do something. What if something happened to Kuroha right this moment? But Amaneko-chan had come all the way here, so it'd be rude to leave...

On that note, WRUR-san was in another room right now. Unlike us, Amaneko-chan couldn't hear her voice, so it'd be bothersome if she started making a fuss.

Now then, there was one thing Amaneko-chan and I could have fun with...

"What do you think this is, Amaneko-chan? ...○†"

"A circle and a cross... It has to be the analog stick and D-pad of the Ninte●do 3DS."

"How do you know about that ancient game console, *Jitsumai*-chan?!"

"And what about this? ...mm□"

"It's the face of a masochistic man with an old lady perm. He's probably excitedly waiting outside the entrance of a Bizarre Club, which is one floor underground."

"Masochist? All it says is the letter m. And what's a Bizarre Club-noda?!"

"And how about this? ...♪"

"That's a music note, of course."

"...I-I don't understand the rules here-noda..."

That's the Amaneko-chan I knew. She completely understood my symbol writing.

Lately, I'd been writing more normally in current-day prose thanks to Kuroha, so it was fun writing in symbols for the first time in a while.

"Nice seeing you two in your own world-noda. I'll be watching TV."

The professor pressed the remote control, and a live broadcast started playing on the large wall-mounted monitor. An old-fashioned building was being shown... *Was it a shrine?* There were barely any shrines in Outer Japan, so I figured it was the Special Cultural District, but that wasn't the case. It was a wedding hall in AKIHABARA built to imitate a shrine.

A government-sponsored wedding ceremony was being held there. Sometimes the government would hold these kinds of events to raise their approval rating among the citizens.

The groom was the oldest member of the Little Sister Party, the 99-year-old 3D politician Itou-san, and the bride was a 2D illustration

of a beautiful girl.

“A marriage between a human old man and a simple drawing. It’s an ancient Japanese tradition to marry an illustration that doesn’t have an AI implanted in it.”

The wedding itself seemed to be already over, and they were currently interviewing the newlyweds. A journalist held a mic up to the 2D bride and asked, “What made you decide to marry him?”

Naturally, silence followed. That was expected. She was just a drawing, so there’s no way she could talk.

“This interaction is the standard protocol for weddings between a human and a drawing.”

“Nii-sama... This is the first time I’ve seen a wedding between a human and a drawing. It would be unheard of in the Special Cultural District. It’s so new and fascinating-nodesu!”

The Special Cultural District was essentially unchanged from the Japan of old. You couldn’t get married to 2D drawings there... I bet a lot of the residents were single.

“This is true Japanese culture-noda. You don’t want 2D culture to die off, do you, Imose-kun?” The professor smirked at me. “Hurry up and get with her to preserve this stuff, too.”

With the professor bugging me so much, and after watching this wedding ceremony, I started imagining what married life between Kuroha and I might be like.

We would rent an apartment together in TOKYO... I was a novelist and Kuroha was a translator. Since we both worked from home, we were always together. We mostly got along, but since we saw each other so much, we’d always get into arguments. She’d cry and say she’d move back to our parents’ place, then Mom would soothe her over the phone...

While that played in my mind, Amaneko-chan frowned at me.

“...Nii-sama, what are you thinking about-nodesu?”

“Uh, that’s...”

“How suspicious... Did you start thinking about marriage after seeing that wedding ceremony?!”

Th-Thump. Amaneko-chan was sharp.

“Marriage... Nii-sama is into 3D, right? If I were to describe the lifelong bond between a human man and woman...”

~

~

“Exactly. I knew you could do it, Amaneko-chan.”

“That just looks like a snake or eel couple to me-noda...”

But then, Amaneko-chan looked sullenly downward.

“...Huh? What’s wrong, Amaneko-chan?”

“I’m your *jitsumai*, so I can’t marry you, Nii-sama. That means you

were imagining marriage with someone other than me, is that right...?”

“...”

She was right on the mark, so I couldn't say anything back.

She looked glum, but then suddenly hugged my arm.

“W-Woah, what is it?”

“Nii-sama! Even if we can't get married, I believe I can live with you as a partner! If you live with me, you'd never have to worry about money-nodesu!”

“Ahahaha. Are you trying to seduce Imose-kun with money, *Jitsumai*-chan?”

“I'll use everything I have at my disposal! ...Nii-sama, my grandfather is very wealthy... When he dies, half of his inheritance will go to me. How about that?!”

Amaneko-chan's grandfather was said to be very well-off. We'd probably never have to worry about money in our lifetimes. *But...*

“It'd be nice to not have to worry about money, but you can't rely on that. You have to work hard and earn it.”

“Of course, I'm not saying we should sit back and be a NEET couple. I just want to use it effectively-nodesu. For example, to establish the 'New Word Order' as a company and assume formal operations!”

“...Amaneko-chan, you're still in middle school, right...?”

“Age doesn't matter when it comes to business!”

I was a little surprised, but it seemed that Amaneko-chan's proactiveness really was a good fit for business. I could see her becoming a talented CEO in the future.

I'm impressed, but sorry, I won't be swayed by money.

“Hmph... So money isn't your weak point... In that case,” she said, then looked at the TV.

It was still showing the wedding hall shrine, the newlyweds, and the guests. It was open to the public too, so there were a lot of onlookers surrounding the area from a distance. There was also a girl wearing a white and red outfit. She was a figure you'd see at every shrine. In this case, maybe she was venue staff? That outfit was...

“It's time for plan B. Professor, bring it out-nodesu.”

A few minutes later...

“Heheheh. What do you think, Imose-kun?”

“It's time to knock Nii-sama out with an outfit change!”

The professor and Amaneko-chan were grinning at me inside the guest room. Neither of them were wearing their usual sailor uniforms. Instead, they were in shrine maiden outfits.

I say shrine maiden, but the skirts were modern style, or in other

words very short. If someone from the past were to see them, they'd think it was cosplay.

“Is this the gift you gave the professor earlier...?”

“That's right, it was this outfit!”



There were several shrines in the Special Culture District, and as many shrine maidens to match. They were numerous enough that my birth father went there just to see the shrine maidens, so the outfits were probably easy to get a hold of.

“Ahahahah. I’ve been playing a really old game lately. The girl is a shrine maiden and nurse at the same time.”

I had no idea what she was talking about.

The two of them enthusiastically showed off their looks to each other. Both of them were petite, so the clothing was a bit large and the sleeves a little too long. It was cute how their little fingertips peeked out from the ends of the sleeves.

“Nii-sama!”

“Imose-kun.”

They each grabbed one of my arms and made a peace sign. They both looked like little sisters, and were now dressed like shrine maidens. *Pretty nice...* They’d cheered me up enough that I almost forgot about the situation at hand.

“Did you know, Nii-sama? The shrine maidens in the past didn’t wear panties-nodesu.”

“They went commando? I’m a traditional lover of panties... but if shrine maidens followed the commando genre, which has been popular for a while now, they must have been pretty progressive thinking.”

“Just for your information, I’m wearing them now-noda.”

“Gotcha. You’re wearing them too, right, Amaneko-chan?”

“...”

Amaneko-chan turned red as an apple.

...?

She remained suspiciously quiet, then said, “Nii-sama, there’s something I want to talk about between just the two of us-nodesu!”

“Huh, w-wait—”

And then Amaneko-chan dragged me to the laboratory’s backyard.

It was a dim yard located between buildings.

“Amaneko-chan, what’s up? That was sudden...”

“Nii-sama, you were thinking about getting married to someone... Th-That’s never happened before! I-I wash sho shocked...”

Wow, she really did sound shocked. Her trademark slurred speech started showing itself. She looked up at me with sullen eyebrows and desperation in her sharp eyes.

“I-If you won’t be swayed by money... then there’s one more weapon I can use-nodesu...”

“Weapon...?”

Amaneko-chan said with resolve, "My body-nodeshu!"

"...Body..."

"Nii-sama, I'm dressed as a traditional shrine maiden under this skirt..."

"...Why are you telling me that..."

"Of course, to show you."

—?!

I gulped. Seeing my *jitsumai* in commando...

"Nii-sama may be a traditional lover of panties, but... The commando style is all the rage right now, and sometimes it'sh important to get with the times-nodeshu!"

Amaneko-chan pinched the ends of her skirt and was about to flip it up. I hurriedly grabbed hold of her hands.

"Amaneko-chan... You can't sell yourself short like that!"

"..."

"You see, panty flashes are... Well, it might not be a panty flash in this case. But they're supposed to be something you can almost see, but not quite. But then you might accidentally see them! Or if you want to see them, you should get on the ground on all fours... That balance is part of the charm. It's true that they're always on display these days. There's no more flashing element to them. But it was thanks to all those excessive panty shots that the counterculture of the commando style was born."

"...So this is an issue of culture, huh. Culture..."

"What I want to say is... They're called privates because they're supposed to be private. They're called intimates because they should stay in. They're called naughty bits because it's naughty to show them!"

"You're supposed to be lecturing me, yet you're using such strong words... I knew Nii-sama was a pervert. It makes my heart race-nodesu...!"

"Anyway, you have nothing to gain from showing that off in the middle of the day. As Odaira-sensei said, the first thing you should show the sun is your armpits."

I had a feeling that everything I just said was senseless nonsense, but whatever!

"I want you to value yourself more." That was my main point.

Amaneko-chan faced me, then looked down. "I understand-nodesu..."

"You got it?"

Relieved, I let go of her hands. And then she grinned mischievously—and flipped up her skirt.

"There-nodesu!"

"Wha, Amaneko-chan!" I turned away, but the hopeless male part

of me took a glance at the underside of her skirt.

The first thing I caught were her slender thighs. There wasn't a single blemish on her smooth skin. Then my gaze went to her crotch, and... I saw a pair of pure black bloomers.

"Huh?"

"Teehee, sorry, Nii-sama. I wanted to tease you a little-nodesu." Amaneko-chan stuck out her tongue.

Geez... You shouldn't toy with your elders!

Amaneko-chan apologized, then said, "Nii-sama, that made me happy. You stopped me when I tried to flip up my skirt... That showed how much you care about me, right?"

"...I guess it did."

"If you were just a horny kid, you'd probably have told me to flip it up while drooling-nodesu. But you're not like that, Nii-sama... How dreamy-nodesu. Though I wouldn't mind no matter how much you looked..."

Amaneko-chan walked up to me. She came close enough that our bodies almost touched. *Huh, something about the air around is different...*

She looked up at me with determination in her eyes, then said—

"I love you, Nii-sama."

It sounded clearly different from the usual Amaneko-chan. It was earnest, filled with her most sincere emotions. So I thought I had to give her a sincere answer.

...But in the end, I couldn't say anything. I was happy to hear her feelings, but when I asked myself if I could answer them, the answer from within my heart said...

"..."

"..."

The silence continued. Amaneko-chan looked at me with her eyebrows furrowed. She was probably trying to read my expression.

I didn't want to hurt her, so I didn't want her to see through me. But I was the type to have my emotions laid out on my face...

I bet she had already guessed it. She looked down for a moment, then faced me again and... smiled.

"...Geez! Why are you looking so grim, Nii-sama?! Saying 'I love you' is just a greeting for me, you know?!"

...

Amaneko-chan laughed and rambled on, saying how "I love you" was a greeting, how kisses were a greeting too, how we could do even more intense things, how she actually wanted to do those things, et cetera. I was taken aback at first, but then returned her smile. It was

the polite thing to do for her, who was working so hard to not sour the mood.

Amaneko-chan kept laughing for a while, but then turned serious.

“Oh... There’s just one thing I’m curious about, Nii-sama. This is something I’ve been wondering for a while now. Is the reason you won’t yield to me...” Her sharp eyes became intense for just a moment, “...Because I’m from the Special Cultural District?”

“...”

“Would it be different if I was from Outer Japan? Do you think we’re incompatible because I grew up somewhere so old-fashioned-nodesu?”

“...Amaneko-chan, are you serious...? It doesn’t matter if you’re from the Special Cultural District or Outer Japan, we’re all from the same country.”

Sure, the residents had pretty different attitudes, and our fundamental cultures differed. Being from the Special Cultural District or Outer Japan... There’s no way we couldn’t get along because of something as trivial as that! I thought Amaneko-chan and I were proof of that. Maybe we couldn’t become a couple, but we were two people who got along.

“...Sorry, I said something silly. You’re actually the type to hate people who think like that-nodesu.”

“You understand?”

“Of course. In return, w-would you punish me-nodeshu?”

“As long as it’s something pure.”

“What? There’s no fun in a pure punishment-nodesu. Go ahead and use me however you want-nodesu!”

Amaneko-chan was back to her usual antics... On the surface, at least.

Amaneko-chan, you might be laughing now, but your heart is probably taking a beating below the surface. If that’s the case, then I have to apologize. Even though you’ve got a one-track mind for me, even though I’m not worth your feelings, even though you’re such a charming girl...

“Geez, Nii-sama! You’re looking gloomy again! Smile-nodesu, smile! You’ll never be able to reach our goal with that attitude!”

“...Goal?”

“Yes! You and I will create the future. We’ll create new words!”

Oh, that’s what she was talking about. Amaneko-chan had been in contact with the Pantyhose Party before, but since her memories had been erased, she didn’t know what the future had in store.

Hey, Amaneko-chan. In the future, a new language called ○(Earsh) will be born based on my writing, and it’ll spread throughout the world. Your dream will come true.

“Oh.” *I see...* A thought came across my mind. In the ‘correct path’ of history, Amaneko-chan’s dream will come true. But to protect Kuroha, I would have to erase the future that Amaneko-chan wished for as well...

“One more thing, Nii-sama. I want to make this clear-nodesu. I’m your *jitsumai*. If there’s anything I can help you with, leave it to me-nodesu!”

“Oh, no... I’d feel bad.”

Amaneko-chan pouted at my response. “Don’t say something so cold ever again! If you say that again, I’ll assault you in your sleep and have my way with you!”

“That sure is a threat... I understand. If anything happens, I’ll count on you.”

“It’s a promise! Don’t hold back!” She grinned brightly. It was an energetic, cheerful smile from ear to ear.

Amaneko-chan returned home soon after that, saying her grandfather would start bothering her soon. She’d come here just to spend the little time she could with me.

“*Jitsumai*-chan’s gone home now, so let’s return to the topic at hand-noda.”

“Hey, Professor. I thought about this while talking with Amaneko-chan, but... Do we really have to change the future?”

“Huh? What are you talking about-noda? Are you insane? Kuro-chan’s in danger, you know?”

“That’s true...”

“We have to create a future without the Pantyhose Party, for Kuro-chan’s sake too-noda!” the professor exclaimed.

Now that Amaneko-chan had left, we’d brought WRUR-san back to the guest room table, where she started shrieking again.

《WAit a moment! LEt’s talk it out. I UNderstand! We are from different times, but we ARE comrades. We are BOth Japanese!》

The professor sneered, “What do you mean, Japanese? You’re nothing more than a pantyhose-noda.”

.....

《NO, NOOOOO. Anija, save me. I’ll be killed! I’ll BE erased!》
WRUR-san wailed, fully aware of her own fate. 《Anija, Anija... Onii-chan!》

I talked with the professor until sunset, but we couldn’t find another solution to this deadlock.

I left the laboratory and was on the train home. I huddled my tired body in the seat and stared blankly out the window. It was night,

so it was dark outside, and my sullen expression reflected in the window.

“Hurry up and settle things with Kuro-chan.”

That was the last thing the professor said to me before I left... But as much as she was pressuring me, I was still hesitant...

I closed my eyes, and two voices echoed within my mind.

“What do you mean, Japanese? You’re nothing more than a pantyhose-noda.”

《NO, NOOOOO. Anija, save me. I’ll be killed! I’ll BE erased!》

The professor’s words and WRUR-san’s cries.

It’s true that the Pantyhose Party was a foreign existence to us. They weren’t beings that we could easily empathize with. Yet...

They were seeds that were supposed to sprout, but we were about to crush them for our own convenience. Was that really the right thing to do?

What if WRUR-san was my sister...? I would think that our current actions were incredibly cruel. We had to erase the Pantyhose Party to protect Kuroha. I knew we had no other choice...

《...U-Um... “Great Father”...》

...?!

While I was absorbed in my own thoughts, WRUR-san’s nervous voice suddenly echoed in my mind. We had decided that I would keep watch over WRUR-san for the time being, so I’d put her inside the pocket of my SCHOOL UNIFORM. I had a hunch that WRUR-san would fall victim to the professor’s experiments if I left her there, so I’d felt a bit sorry for her.

《...UM, I’d like to confirm again, but... WILL I really be killed...?》

.....

We won’t rip you apart or anything. But when we’ve ‘locked down’ the different future...

《SO our very existence will disappear.》

I guess that’s what’ll happen.

《.....》

WRUR-san stayed silent for a while, then said, *《HOW strange. There ARE many things I want to accomplish, and I WOULD normally be thinking about what to do when I return to the future, but right now I’M thinking...》*

WRUR-san’s voice sounded nostalgic.

《...that I want to see Anija.》

Siblings, huh...

For some reason, I felt like I wanted to keep talking with this

lifeform from the future. They may be targeting Kuroha, but I wasn't convinced that this one was entirely evil.

I also had a little sister, and my head was filled with thoughts of her, so I might have a soft spot for the topic of siblings right now. So I suggested the following.

“Do you want to talk for a bit? There are some things I want to ask about your brother...”

WRUR Pantyhose had a brother named RBUR Pantyhose. I had met him once before. RBUR-san had been manufactured on the same production cycle as WRUR-san, and their birth dates were only 15 minutes apart. He was the prime minister of 38th-century Japan, had a deep love for his country, and had strong pride in traditional Japanese culture.

《Anija is a nationalist. A RATHER severe one, too.》

The “traditional culture” that RBUR-san loved wasn't 2D culture, or the ancient Japanese culture that I knew. It was their version of “traditional culture.” In other words, the culture of the Pantyhose Party, which came into play after the 30th century.

《Anija is incredibly proud of the Pantyhose Party race. That's because...》

The Pantyhose Party had apparently revived Japan. A bit before the 30th century, Japan had fallen to ruin. In a human-based society, your population and resources affected your national power. Japan had comparatively less of both, so their status had degraded to that of a minor country in the far east.

《BUT after we Pantyhose Party became the center of society, the STRUCTure of society itself transformed, AND Japan was revitalized.》

Then, elements from the newly revived Japan gradually spread to the rest of the world.

《These symbols are tHE common language of the world, ○(Earsh). Anija had studied ○(Earsh) at the ACAdemy.》

○(Earsh). That was the language of the future, born from my symbol writing. It would eventually become the unifying language of the world, but it had its roots in Japan. Essentially, Japanese would become the official language of the world.

If I were to phrase it differently... The Japanese language would rule the world. And that was something RBUR-san was proud of to his core.

《THAT'S right... Anija is AN adherent believer in ○(Earsh).》

I see... I was beginning to understand more about RBUR's personality. Or should I say pantyhose-ality?

He loved Japan.

He was proud of the Pantyhose Party.

And he was an adherent believer of ○(Earsh), which spread from Japan to the world. From that description, the first thing I could say for sure was...

《YES. He is a firm believer IN the ‘correct path’ of history.》

...

I had a sinking feeling in my stomach.

Is there any chance that RBUR-san will leave us alone?

《I believe he WILL come sooner or later. HE is also AWARE of the situation at hand.》

I see... I bet there's not much chance that we could have a friendly chat when that happens...

Then, WRUR-san's voice changed to a pleading tone.

《UM... “Great Father,” I have one wish.》

What is it?

《THERE is a chance that Anija will bring harm TO you or Kuroha Imose. I know it is impossible to ask you to not blame him if that happens. But if you can, please understand Anija's perspective AS well. He may be an idiot sometimes, BUT he REally does love this country...》

I could sense the love in her words.

I see. WRUR-san, you sure love your brother.

《W-WELL, he IS my brother...》

Wow, so you don't deny it. Can I call you Brother Complex-san?

《Th-That's not true! A-ACTually, I don't feel that way for Anija...》

Hahahah, you're embarrassed. If you were human, I bet you'd be blushing right now. I guess we humans and Pantyhose Party aren't so different, after all.

《G-Geez. “Great Father,” YOU can be mean sometimes...》

This was pleasant.

...

There was something on my mind. I said this to the professor in my mind, now that she wasn't here.

Hey, Professor. You told WRUR-san that “You're nothing more than a pantyhose,” right?

I didn't say anything at the time, but I wasn't fond of that phrase. Because it didn't show any empathy. WRUR-san looks like a pantyhose on the outside, but we're getting along just fine. When I teased her about her love for her brother, she got embarrassed just like a cute girl!

I came to one conclusion after talking with WRUR-san: We could communicate with the Pantyhose Party.

Even if we weren't compatible in some ways, I think we could talk it out and come to a mutual understanding. I had thought that there was no way to protect Kuroha but to erase the Pantyhose Party.

But maybe there's another solution where we don't have to erase them...

《...?! “Great Father,” ARE you...》

Oh, no.... Sorry. I haven't thought of any good solutions yet, and I can't promise anything as long as Kuroha is at stake. My top priority is Kuroha. If she's in danger, I'll do everything in my power to fight back. But... It's also true that I've started wanting to find a way to potentially preserve your futures as well.

《...Ohh... AS expected of the “Great Father”... You are able to understand us...》

I hated prejudice and lack of empathy. I used to be like that, but after experiencing so many things, I had grown. That, and...

“Wouldn't it be nice for a 23rd-century human and a Pantyhose Party to become friends?”

I got off at the nearest station and walked home. The time was 7:30 pm, and the sun had already set. I navigated through the residential streets at dusk. I'd be able to see my house after turning the next corner...

“...?”

I squinted. There was a bright light coming from around the corner.

A fire? No, the light was too white for that, and there was no noise. If something was on fire, the light should be more tinted red, and there would be flickering noises... What was that...?

《TH-THIS feeling...!》 WRUR-san exclaimed in shock from within my pocket.

A chill ran down my back. I had a feeling that something tremendous was happening. And it wasn't something good... Exactly the opposite.

“...”

My sense of unease made me hurry around the corner. Then, what appeared before my eyes...

“Wha...?!”

...was a scene that I couldn't believe.

A pillar of light was in the middle of the road, and around the pillar was...

A spiral of pantyhose flying downward.

This was exactly the same as the “Great Descent” scene I had written in my novel before. A cylindrical pillar of light rose to the sky, and pantyhose wrapped in a golden light swirled downward around it

as they descended to the ground.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven... It was a flock of dozens of pantyhose.

What were they? That went without saying—they were the Pantyhose Party.

It was majestic.

It was divine.

But... It was also foreboding.

Maybe this was a clichéd comparison, but it was as if fallen angels were descending from the heavens.

“...”

Overwhelmed, I couldn't even raise my voice, and just burned the sight into my eyes in a daze.

And then... perhaps it wasn't in my place, but WRUR-san raised her voice from within my pocket and said—

《—Anija.》

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

“Kuroha, there's an interesting feature in this month's *Literary Gal*. You can check how similar you are to Odaira-sensei. Let's give it a shot!”

Special Issue Literary Gal October 2202

Check Your Odaira Gai Level!

<Question A> You walk down the street and see a cute girl huddled up ahead of you. The girl is:

- I. A high schooler
- II. A middle schooler
- III. A grade schooler
- IV. A fairy

<Question B> Select the correct meaning of the following ancient proverb: “AHENASHI” (敢へ無し)

- I. To have no other solution, to be at a loss
- II. A person named Ahena-shi
- III. To feel unsatisfied because there is no ahégao
- IV. Personally, I prefer it when she makes less exaggerated faces

<Question C> It has been exposed that you are dating your little sister. What do you do?

- I. Take your little sister and run far away. Or try to convince the

people around you.

II. Tearfully part with your little sister.

III. I live in an orthodox literature environment where our parents are not present and I live together with my little sister, so there's no problem.

IV. I am my own little sister character, a blonde-haired twin-tailed 'self-sis,' so there's no problem.

< Question D > State your opinion on *jitsumai* and *gimai*.

I. I only accept *jitsumai*. Anything except *jitsumai* is trash.

II. I like *jitsumai* more, but don't mind *gimai*.

III. I prefer *gimai*. Romance with *jitsumai* is too heavy.

IV. *Jitsumai* are only an illusion inside people's heads. Only *gimai* exist in this world.

< Scoring >

Question A I ☐0 II ☐1 III ☐4 IV ☐5

Question B I ☐1 II ☐0 III ☐3 IV ☐5

Question C I ☐3 II ☐0 III ☐1 IV ☐5

Question D I ☐0 II ☐2 III ☐4 IV ☐5

< Results >

20 points - You are Odaira Gai himself.

15-19 points - A-level Odaira Gai. Try spending an entire day only talking with the little sisters in your head.

10-14 points - B-level Odaira Gai. Try buying an ancient randoseru.

5-9 points - C-level Odaira Gai. Try appointing yourself as an elementary school "security guard."

0-4 points - Not Odaira Gai. You have no hope, so just try sucking up to adult women.

Chapter 4: The Moon's Memories

“Wh-Wha...” My lips trembled.

My instinctive response was—fear. Not just one or two, but dozens of otherworldly Pantyhose Party members were descending to the ground one after the other. The bright white light that filled my vision was slowly being covered in black.

《Anija BRought oVER his ELite guard. They are especially PROFicient in physical and memory mANIpulation.》

...What was RBUR-san planning to do with such a sinister-sounding group? And then, while my feet were still frozen in place, the dozens of Pantyhose Party before me... disappeared.

“...Huh?”

They all vanished without a trace. The pillar of light was gone, too.

All that was left was the neighborhood street at night. It wasn't completely silent now, but there were no notable sounds, and it was such a large contrast from a moment ago that I doubted whether the sight I had just witnessed had been reality. Where did RBUR-san go? Didn't he want something with me?

《THE fact that Anija showed UP here and nOW was DEFINitely meant as a message for You, “Great Father,” BUT... I am not sure what his EXAct motive is...》

I see... Then let me think. If there was someplace RBUR-san would be likely to go next...

“...Kuroha!”

In the next moment, I darted forward like something had just exploded behind me.

Damn it! Just try doing something to Kuroha! I won't let you see the end of it!

Kuroha, please be okay!

I slammed open the front door and ran into my house. I hurriedly took off my shoes and was about to run upstairs... but then saw something unimaginable. I guess you could also call it otherworldly.

It was Odaira-sensei (girl form) in the nude.

“Uwaaaaaaah!” It caught me so off guard that my brain stopped

functioning.

Sensei bent down, picked up the bath towel at his feet, and quickly wrapped it around his body.

“Hey there, Gin-kun. I came here to play again. I just borrowed your bath.”

I-I see...

“Do you want to see more? Unfortunately, I won’t show you. I don’t have a habit of showing myself off to dudes.”

“...When you put it that way, that does make me want to see more...”

“I’m planning to show Miru-chan. That’s why I’m here to stake her out.”

“...If I may, I predict that she’ll treat your presence like air, or perhaps dirt. Shall I go and scold her in advance?”

...Wait, this isn’t the time to be talking with Sensei!

“Excuse me!”

I left Sensei behind and dashed upstairs. I entered Kuroha’s room, and... she wasn’t there.

“...!”

Kuroha, where are you?!

I couldn’t help but imagine the worst possible scenario.

“Damn it!”

I shook my head to get rid of those thoughts. That wouldn’t happen. Kuroha was being protected by the professor’s invention right now.

I ran to my room and opened the door. She wasn’t there either. I rushed back downstairs to the living room, where my parents and Yuzu-san were watching TV.

“Um, have you seen Kuroha?”

“Oh, welcome home, Gin-san. Kuroha-san, you ask? I believe she’s in her room...”

“She wasn’t there. Do you know if she went out?!”

“...I’m sorry, I don’t know.”

My parents shook their heads, too. *Maybe the bathroom, then?* I ran down the hallway and knocked on the bathroom door, but there was no reply.

The one place left was... I looked in a certain direction and could tell someone was there. The descent of the Pantyhose Party had put me in panic mode, so I did something I normally would never do... Which was suddenly open the door to the changing room. In there was...

A nude Miru.

“...Nii?”

The air froze for a second. I was directly faced with the figure of Miru drying her hair with a bath towel. She blushed ever so slightly.

“S-Sorry!” I hurriedly closed the door.

“...If you want to see, submit a request first,” she lightly chided me.

“Sure. And if you want to see my naked body, feel free to submit a request too.”

“Got it.”

“Do you know where Kuroha is, by the way?”

“Nee? She’s...”



An hour later, in my room.

“...And that’s how I accidentally saw Sensei and Miru naked.”

“I see.”

“They were both so smooth and flat...”

“You don’t have to include those details, idiot.”

“But I want to make sure I record them to memory.”

We were having our usual “LILSIS READ KANJI” writing session.

Kuroha was fine. She was just getting a book from the underground library. At first I had been worried that she was feeling down and had cooped herself up in there, but that wasn’t the case. She had simply gone there to find a book. In any case, I was so relieved that I’d almost cried after finding her.

But... I still couldn’t let my guard down. RBUR-san and his lackeys had come to this century. It was impossible for me to not feel anxious. After I’d found Kuroha, I somehow managed to hide my distress and called the professor.

“Professor, it’s the great descent of the Pantyhose Party! The nylon dance!”

“Calm down, Imose-kun. We’re protected from their tricks right now-noda. Nothing will happen to you or Kuro-chan.”

“But there were so many of them! Wouldn’t they be able to destroy the world if they felt like it?!”

The next reply came not from the professor, but from within my pocket.

《DON’T worry, Anija would NOT do that. THAT would stray too FAR from the “correct path” of history. Anija’s DESire is to correct history IN the most peaceful way POSSible.》

“Imose-kun, I understand that you’re upset. But they’ve already concealed themselves, so we can’t do anything right now. Come to my lab tomorrow and we’ll develop a plan-noda. If you want to do something about it before then, hurry up and do the deed with Kuro-chan. You might still have your doubts, but it’s worth a shot-noda.”

The professor and WRUR-san tried to calm me down, saying it wouldn’t suddenly become a dire situation. That still didn’t clear up all my worries, but... For the time being, I should try to keep my cool to prevent Kuroha from getting suspicious.

I felt like I’d let something slip if I opened my mouth, so I kept quiet. However, that made Kuroha ask me “What’s wrong? Are you not feeling well?” which made my chest hurt.

I somehow finished up today’s “LILSIS READ KANJI” writing session, turned off the light, and lay in my bed next to Kuroha.

“U-Um, y-you know... It’s not like I want to sleep here or

anything. I'm just tired, so I'm resting here for now. I'll go to my room later, o-of course."

What a thinly veiled excuse... How cute.

We were clearly violating the rules of the Imose household right now, but that didn't matter. I wanted to stay with Kuroha 24/7 if I could.

"Yup, got it. Rest here as long as you need."

"...Okay."

On that note, WRUR-san was in the closet. She protested with a 《But you just said we were friends!》, but I didn't want her to get in the way of my time with Kuroha.

Whenever I had a moment of free time, my mind wandered to thinking about what we should do next. To protect Kuroha, I had to create a future where the Pantyhose Party didn't exist. But to do that, I also had to sacrifice many things. The future with me and Yuzu-san in the "correct path" of history. The future of WRUR-san and the Pantyhose Party. I had to protect Kuroha, but I had yet to resolve myself to make those sacrifices... *What should I do?*

Kuroha must have noticed that I was still awake as I pondered. She abruptly spoke to me.

"Hey, Onii-chan... There was a public wedding ceremony on TV today."

"...There was. Did you watch it, too?"

"I did. I had my doubts about getting married to a silent drawing, but... That must have been that old man's own form of happiness."

"I guess so. It made me think a little about marriage."

"You too, Onii-chan...?"

"Hm?"

I had imagined married life with Kuroha earlier today. In that case, did Kuroha also...? I turned to face her, and she looked back at me.

"..."

"..."

Both of us turned to the ceiling in a fluster. I couldn't tell what she looked like in the dark, but both of our faces were probably bright red right now...

Getting married to Kuroha, huh... If that happened, we would sleep and wake up in the same bed until one of us died. It would become a matter of course for us to sleep together like this. No one would fault us for it, and we wouldn't feel guilty about it either. Was that the future Kuroha wanted...? I think I could understand how she felt now... I recalled the professor's words.

"...Hurry up and do the deed with Kuro-chan."

I still had my doubts, but now that RBUR-san had come to this

time period, we couldn't twiddle our thumbs any longer. To make Kuroha's safety my top priority, should I follow the professor's advice...?

My chest suddenly grew hot at the thought. A pajama-clad Kuroha was lying next to me in bed right now, and she was stimulating my five senses whether I intended it or not.

The smell of the shampoo in her hair. Her body heat under the blanket. The occasional sound of her soft breaths. All of those were provoking something within me. It went without saying, but I was a man, and she was a woman...

I was starting to feel short of breath, so I went to unbutton two of my pajama buttons. But when I moved my left hand, it brushed against Kuroha's hand.

"!"

"...!"

This was nothing we would have minded under normal circumstances. We'd held hands all the time when we were little, and even now I touched her back every night. Brushing our hands against each other was nothing.

However, both Kuroha and I flinched and moved our hands away. We had both overreacted, so did that mean both of us were feeling self-conscious about each other...?

"..."

"..."

I unbuttoned two of my shirt buttons and lay my left hand on the bed. Then, Kuroha's slender finger brushed against my hand again. I was surprised, but Kuroha didn't move her hand away. *Was that an accident, or...?*

A few more seconds passed. Recalling the professor's words and then touching Kuroha's hand aroused me more than I thought it would. My breathing became heavier, and I felt something begin to boil under my skin.

My mind was completely lost in this mood, so I had the following thought:

If I grabbed her hand now, what would happen?

Would that be the trigger that led to something bigger?

...

This wasn't good. I wanted to make this decision when I had a clear head and no more hesitations. I squeezed my eyes shut and suppressed my urges so that I didn't give in to the moment.

My instincts and reason clashed. It almost got to the point where instinct won out, but I barely held on to reason. And then my inner conflict ended... In a completely unexpected way.

The bedroom door creaked open.

“—!”

“?! ”

Kuroha and I bolted upright. We looked toward the door to see someone's silhouette backlit by the light from the hallway. I hurriedly got out of bed, stood up straight, and mumbled the person's name.

“Yuzu-san... Why...?”

No way! The door should have been locked. I was the only one who had the key. So why was Yuzu-san here?!

Yuzu-san said “Excuse me,” then turned on the light to my room. The light burned my eyes, like it was judging the two of us. I hesitated to look at Yuzu-san's face, since I figured I already knew what kind of expression she was making. Whether I wanted to or not, though, Yuzu-san's illuminated face entered my vision. She was...

Smiling.

...I didn't expect that at all. Was the sight of me and Kuroha in the same bed not that surprising...?

“Sorry for barging in. I had a strange feeling, like I had to go to Gin-san's room...”

“Just out of the blue...?”

“Yes. I had a thought flash into my head that Gin-san and Kuroha-san were in danger. And then when I went to your room, the door was open...”

...I see. She'd had the unnatural thought that made her go to my room, and then my door, which should have been locked, was open... That would normally be impossible, but it could be the result of someone's prank. And I think I knew who that might be.

RBUR Pantyhose-san and his guards. To them, it would be a walk in the park to control Yuzu-san's mind or unlock the door to my room. I wanted to say this to RBUR-san:

Aren't you being petty here?! Is this really what someone who traveled all the way here from the future would do?! If you want to get in the way of Kuroha and myself, don't you have any better methods?!

“Yuzu-san, I...” Kuroha had turned pale and couldn't say anything else.

Yuzu-san continued smiling, then walked to Kuroha in bed.

“Geez, Kuroha-san. Didn't I ask you when we had first met? If you liked Gin-san? Why didn't you tell me back then?”

That was when we had met Yuzu-san in the 21st century. I had accidentally eavesdropped on their conversation. Back then, Kuroha had denied having any feelings for me...

“Honestly, how troubling. If you had told me your true feelings back then, Kuroha-san...”

.....

I felt something off about Yuzu-san's smile. Was the Pantyhose

Party controlling her emotions, too? But that wasn't the case.

"Then I wouldn't... have become like this now..."

Yuzu-san's expression began to distort. Cracks formed in her smile, slowly peeling away. Her true feelings under the mask revealed itself. Tears formed in her blue eyes... I had to say something. I had to say something. Kuroha was also silent and pale right now, so I had to do something. But sadly, I remained dumbfounded and couldn't squeeze out any words.

Yuzu-san, who had been watching us silently, turned back and took wobbly steps to the door.

"...Sorry for suddenly barging in. That was rude of me. It's time for a change of pace..."

"Change of pace...?"

"I'll go outside and get some fresh air. Yeah, that's what I'll do. Yeah..." Yuzu-san mumbled as she walked out the door. She wasn't going to her own room, but to the front door downstairs. *Should we just let her go...?*

"Yuzu-san, wait. Please, hear me out—"

"..." She ignored me and rushed down the stairs. The sight of her back was telling me, "Leave me be," and I couldn't chase after her.

Kuroha and I, now alone, stared wordlessly at the door. It had happened so suddenly that I wondered if it was a joke, but this was the unfortunate reality. Yuzu-san had found out our secret! What should I do? My mind was a mess. What should I do about Yuzu-san? What should I do about Kuroha? If Yuzu-san told our family about us, what should I tell our parents and Miru? I had to stay calm, but my mind and chest were about to overheat.

Then, Kuroha's trembling voice splashed some cold water on me.

"...Hey, Onii-chan. When Yuzu-san said she'd go outside..."

"What?"

"...I don't want to think about it, but what if she became depressed, and..."

"...Depressed?"

"..."

That word, combined with Kuroha's pale expression, made me remember something.

One day at the beach during summer break, Kuroha had consulted with me under the pretense of "love advice for a friend." There was a little sister who loved her older brother, and her friend also loved that older brother... But if the brother and sister got into a relationship, the friend...

"...Could become so depressed that she might even die."

“...Kuroha, please don’t say something so absurd. Yuzu-san wouldn’t become that depressed.”

“I don’t want to think about it either... But Yuzu-san came to this century all by herself and is being treated like Onii-chan’s fiancée... She must have been so happy, but then saw us like that... What would she think?”

I shook my head. “Even then, there’s no way she would... No way...!”

Yuzu-san wouldn’t die! That couldn’t happen! Absolutely not!

Memories of Yuzu-san played back in my mind. We had first met in the 21st century, and then we traveled to the 23rd century together. Most of my memories were of her smiling, but there were moments where she cried, too...

Damn it, wasn’t this the type of flashback you see before you die? What a bad omen! The distress welled up inside me until it reached a boiling point, and I bolted out of my room.

When I stepped outside, there was already no sign of Yuzu-san. I had no idea where she might have gone, so I circled the surrounding area like a dog. I was worried about leaving Kuroha alone, but this was an emergency. I needed to find Yuzu-san as soon as I could and bring her back.

“...Yuzu-san, don’t do anything rash...”

Yuzu-san, I owe so much to you. When I was young, *Oniaka* gave me a dream. But *Oniaka* was based on the book you wrote, *Ani MAJI Mania*. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that I was saved by your feelings. I didn’t want to think about it, but if my savior, Yuzu-san, were to end her life because of me...

“Then I would die too.”

I wouldn’t be able to live with myself! I would go to the afterlife to apologize to her. As I seriously pondered those thoughts, I continued to look for Yuzu-san. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes... I couldn’t find her anywhere.

After running around blindly in nothing but a panic for a while, I finally arrived at a park built on top of a mountain.

“Ah...” I accidentally let out a sigh when I stepped into the park. I saw a beautiful figure turned away from me, sitting on a bench illuminated by the street lights and under the moon in the sky.

“Yuzu-san... Thank god...”

“Eh? Gin-san...?”

The relief overcame me, and I looked right at Yuzu-san with tears in my eyes.

“You can’t kill yourself! What are you thinking?!”

“Kill myself...?”

“...Oh.”

Her puzzled reaction brought me back to my senses. I was an idiot. I had just convinced myself that she was thinking of killing herself...

Yuzu-san chuckled, “...Did you think I was going to kill myself? I didn’t get that depressed.”

“I-I’m sorry. Of course you wouldn’t.” I scratched my head, then sat down next to her.

I looked at her face in profile. There were traces of tears on her cheeks, and her blue eyes were tinted red. But she didn’t seem to be crying now. She had probably thought about a lot of things here...

“...”

“...”

I wasn’t sure what to talk about and couldn’t come up with the next words to say. Yuzu-san looked down at the night city past the mountain. A somewhat chilly wind brushed past the both of us. I couldn’t just stay silent like this...

“Um, so... Are you okay?” I asked, then immediately cursed my lack of communication skills.

“...I made you worried enough to ask that. Even I can’t pretend and say I’m all okay right now...” Yuzu-san didn’t try to put on a happy face. “I came here after that and thought to myself. Honestly, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t shocked... But after I calmed down... I realized I’m in no position to meddle with your love lives.”

“No... It was my fault for leaving things vague.”

It’s true that we could love whoever we wanted to. But Yuzu-san had confessed to me, and I was aware of what my parents thought, too. It was my fault for not giving her a clear answer. I bowed down deeply to her.

“I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s not your fault, Gin-san... I’m also sorry for interrupting your baby-making.”

“Baby-making?!” My voice cracked.

“...You two were in the process of making a child, were you not?”

I denied her in a fluster, then explained what the two of us had been up to. I explained that at Kuroha’s suggestion, we had started playing “WRITE-ON-THE-BODY” every night and were writing a novel together. That it had been a rule for us to keep it a secret from everyone else. That Kuroha often ended up sleeping in my room afterward, and that was exactly what had happened earlier.

“Oh my... It looks like I got the wrong idea...” Yuzu-san blushed red, embarrassed at her misunderstanding. “Your mother and father both call me your fiancée. Kuroha-san must have been very troubled

by that... I understand why she wouldn't be able to say anything, considering those around her..."

Yuzu-san said all that while looking out in the distance. She must have been contemplating Kuroha's feelings.

I looked at her pondering expression and thought to myself, *Yuzu-san is okay, and we cleared up the misunderstanding that Kuroha and I had been making children. That's a relief, but it doesn't put an end to this situation.*

In fact, it was now time to settle things. Me, Yuzu-san, and Kuroha... How should we untangle this web of three differently colored threads?

For better or worse, all of us now knew about each other's feelings. So we had to come to a conclusion. We couldn't ignore it any longer.

Yuzu-san must be thinking the same thing, too... I looked at Yuzu-san, who was once again gazing down below her. I matched her line of sight.

The city sprawling below the mountain didn't have any extraordinary features. There were some lights here and there, but nothing I would call beautiful. It was just an ordinary neighborhood at night.

Yuzu-san was looking at the view rather intensely. *Is there something on her mind?* I thought, trying to read her expression, and then she spoke.

"Gin-san. This is the city you were raised in, right?"

"That's right. I've lived here for 17 years."

"Oh, no. I phrased that incorrectly," she shook her head, then spoke again. "...This is the city you and Kuroha-san were raised in."

Those words made me reminisce. Subconsciously, memories of a young Kuroha resurfaced in my mind.

"What were you like when you were young, Gin-san?" asked Yuzu-san. I told her some stories of when I was in kindergarten. I said that before I discovered literature, I was just your average energetic kid. She laughed in response, saying she wanted to see what I was like back then.

"I've said this before, but Kuroha was a problem child. She would always butt heads with the other kids. She was even more stubborn back then than she is now, so she was a handful. Well, as her older brother, I couldn't leave her alone."

I recalled some more stories. Like when I had scribbled in a modern literature book that she liked and we got into a huge argument, or when she had wet the bed and I lied saying it was me to cover for her, but our mom found out anyway.

I continued talking for a while. Yuzu-san grinned the whole time, listening on. *Huh... Am I the only one talking?*

"...And well, that's how we were. How about you, Yuzu-san? I bet you've been popular since you were a kid."

Yuzu-san laughed and said, "No, I was an outcast back then."

"...Huh?"

"In kindergarten, everyone stayed away from me. I mean, I look like this." She pointed to her hair and eyes. She was indicating how she looked different since she was half-Caucasian.

"Back then, I figured I was left out because I wasn't purely Japanese."

"That's not..." *true*... I couldn't bring myself to finish the sentence. Right now there were foreigners everywhere so I couldn't imagine it, but back then, apparently there was a lot more discrimination. Judging people just by the color of their eyes or hair... Japan back then was so immature. That's just prejudice. I didn't like that way of thinking.

"But I thought I couldn't blame it on other people... I thought hard about it... And decided I wanted to have people see me for who I was inside."

I see. Yuzu-san had gone through a lot... To be able to intermingle with her surroundings, she must have raised herself to become an amicable person who could be liked by anyone. She'd mentioned her ability to read people before, and I thought that was an impressive skill. It was crucial for surviving in this world.

I told her how impressed I was, and she smiled, saying I didn't need to praise her.

"After listening to your stories, this is what I realized. I've only known you for a few months, but this city holds 16 years worth of memories."

"...16 years."

She was referring to the amount of time both Kuroha and I had spent here.

"That's what this city is. Gin-san was born here, then Kuroha-san. In a sense, this is the city where you two met. You could even say that this is the place where you read *Oniaka* and found your dream."

Yuzu-san was talking in a bittersweet tone, which made the bottom of my chest feel slightly hot. The city where I found my dream, huh...

"It's true that the first time I read *Oniaka* was at home, so you could put it that way..."

"*Oniaka*'s Homiyura-san is a very important existence for you, isn't she?"

"Yes. I am who I am now all because of Homiyura."

“...”

Yuzu-san looked serious for a moment, but quickly returned to smiling. “How mysterious. *Oniaka* changed history, but that novel was born through a series of small coincidences. If someone at some point down the road made a different decision, then the world would have turned into something completely different.”

“That’s right. When you think about it like that, it really is mysterious.”

“In that case, any small decision today might change what the future holds.”

“Like what they call a choice of destiny?”

“That’s right. It really is. So...” Yuzu-san closed her eyes, then stared straight at me.

I was taken aback. Her blue eyes were colored in determination. What was she about to say? I had a feeling that it would be something important... I sat up straight and returned her gaze. *What are you about to say, Yuzu-san...?*

A night breeze suddenly blew between us, then she said in a clear voice:

“Gin-san, please embrace me.”

...

I didn’t completely understand her goal or purpose in asking that. But I could tell that she was asking me to make a decision. It was her way of trying to settle things. Yeah, that’s right. I had to give her an answer...

“—*Embrace me.*”

If I were to hug her right now, would that “lock down” the future? Would it turn into a future with me and Yuzu-san? Would I stay by her side forever?

I thought about her again. She was bright, kind, and beloved by everyone. She was like the sun. Her social skills and adaptability weren’t things she was born with, but weapons she learned to use to survive.

She had been through enough that she’d had no choice but to learn those things. She had been mistreated by her parents and constantly fought with the prejudice around her. From the bottom of my heart, I wanted her to be happy.

But I also thought this—at the very least, she had those weapons. In this world, there were sadly a countless number of people who didn’t have them. Unable to communicate with the people around them, they would shut themselves off in their own world...

...Like my little sister, Kuroha.

“...”

Yuzu-san wordlessly stared at me, then giggled and faced at the sky. The golden moon was looking down at us.

Still looking upward, Yuzu-san said, “...Okay. Gin-san, I understand now.”

She had a tone and expression of defeat, seeming like she'd grasped something. That's when I realized that she had come to an answer.

“This... will be a long battle.”

“Long battle?”

“Yes. Right now, it's a few months versus 16 years. But in 100 years, it'll be 100 versus 116 years. The gap will reduce to nothing. I'll do my own research in the meantime, and figure out how to win.”

“...”

I'm sure the 100 years was just an exaggeration. But it seemed that Yuzu-san had just thrown away her desire to be with me immediately.

I felt one of the threads untangle itself and go away. It was a sad moment, but I didn't have the right to say anything. I mean, the one who caused this was none other than me.

“Yuzu-san, um...” I wanted to apologize, but I felt like saying sorry would be cruel, so I didn't continue.

Then, Yuzu-san put on a soft smile.

“It's okay. I was able to figure this out right now, Gin-san belongs to Homyura-san.”

Huh? I belong to Homyura?

Homyura's appearance was based on Yuzu-san. And her thoughts were also based on Yuzu-san's... right? If I belong to Homyura, does that mean I belong to Yuzu-san? But she phrased it as if she was a third party...

“What does that mean...?”

“...I've been asked to keep quiet, so I can't answer that.”

???

Yuzu-san stared up at the sky again, and said to herself, “I want to have a goal to prepare for the long battle ahead. A goal that will help me live in this time period.”

Those words were filled with an optimistic power. I was ashamed of myself. It was rude of me to think she would fall to despair and kill herself. She wasn't such a weak girl like that. She was stronger than both Kuroha and me.

Yuzu-san. I'm sorry for not being able to embrace you. But if there's anything I can do for you, I want to. I want to do everything I can to support you living in this time period. So, while I can't embrace you...

I held out my hand to Yuzu-san.

“My. What is it, Gin-san?”

“Let’s shake hands, Yuzu-san.”

She stared at my outstretched hand, then giggled, and softly grasped it back. And then—she pulled me toward her. I lost my balance, and my face was brought toward Yuzu-san’s.

“...Wha?” I looked at her in confusion.

“Kuroha-san, I’m sorry. Please forgive me. I won’t do anything bad like this again. Please let me make just this one memory,” she said, and then pressed her lips against my cheek.



After that, Yuzu-san and I headed back home.

“Hey, Gin-san. I won’t tell anyone else about you two, so please continue writing ‘LILSIS READ KANJI’ with Kuroha-san,” Yuzu-san said on the way home.

There was still the separate issue of what to do with Kuroha, but Yuzu-san’s thoughtfulness touched me. She was so open-minded. I was probably a fool to not embrace Yuzu-san earlier. But that decision didn’t involve just logic...

“Gin-san, I’ll be in your care once again.”

Of course. As you can see, I’m no good, but I’ll be in your care too.

When we arrived home, Yuzu-san returned to her own room, and I went back to mine. Kuroha wasn’t there. I checked the closet just in case, and found WRUR-san sleeping with a 《zzz...》, but no sign of Kuroha. I wondered if she returned to her own room, so I went to check and... she wasn’t there, either.

“Oh no...” A sense of dread surged forth within me. I couldn’t leave Yuzu-san alone, but I’d left Kuroha behind for too long. We should have gone to look for her together...

For now, I had to find her again. Would she be in Yuzu-san’s room? Maybe she’d been waiting there for her to come back? I was about to run out of Kuroha’s room in a panic,

“Wha...”

But then I froze in place.

A floating pantyhose appeared in the middle of the room.

《IT has been a WHILE, “Great Father.”》

It was a male voice I had heard before.

“...RBUR Pantyhose-san...”

《I HAd thought we would never meet again, ANd that would have been for the BEst.》

RBUR-san’s voice was cold. It was clear from his tone that he wasn’t trying to make friends.

《IT seems that throwing Mirokuin Yuzu into the mix not only Did nothing, but rather had the opposite effect. Well, I honestly hadn’t believed that it WOUld resolve ANYthing.》

“So that really was you...”

《INdeed.》

I hadn’t thought much of it before, but the image of a pantyhose floating in the air really was alien. It made me realize that I was dealing with a being clearly different from us humans, and that sent a shiver down my spine. But... we could communicate with them.

“Please hear me out, RBUR-san. I want to choose a future where you all won’t be erased. Let’s talk about this.”

《...》

RBUR-san remained silent and floated toward me.

《DO you have any great ideas? OH “Great Father.”》

“...”

In short, I didn’t. I felt like if I thought long and hard about it I could have come up with something, but everything had happened too fast.

《...THis will not get us anywhere. IN that case, YOu should let us manipulate your memories, reset everything, and WALK down the “right path” of history.》

“That’s...”

I couldn’t agree to that. I already knew too much. If I hadn’t learned anything, maybe I would have been okay with doing as he said, but right now I wanted to decide the future with my own two hands.

《JUDging by that reaction... YOu are refusing. IT seems that it is too late. In THat case, I have another idea.》

RBUR-san ascended higher in the air, did a twirl, and then declared:

《I have erased Kuroha Imose.》

“Wha...?!” My mouth hung half-open, unable to form any words. And then, RBUR-san vanished before my eyes.

.....

Left behind, his last words echoed in my head.

He erased Kuroha? That can’t be. We were being protected by the professor’s invention. We’d already proven that it could block any interference from the Pantyhose Party, and if they really could use their powers, then they’d try to control Kuroha’s mind first. If they hadn’t done so yet, that must have meant that they couldn’t.

It’s okay, it’s okay, I repeated to myself. *I’m sure it’s just a threat.*

But... a foreboding sense of dread was forming within me.

He was a being from the future, beyond human understanding. There’s a chance he still had some power we didn’t know about. Right this moment, Kuroha might be...

“Kuroha!”

“Kyah!”

.....

...Huh?

“G-Geez, Onii-chan. It’s the middle of the night! You’re too loud.”

I turned around to face the source of that familiar voice, and saw Kuroha standing there in her usual blouse and skirt.

Kuroha! You’re okay!

I was relieved, but we weren't in the clear yet. I grabbed her shoulders.

"Hey! Have you noticed anything unusual?!"

"Wh-What's going on? There's nothing unusual..."

To make sure she wasn't being mind controlled, I asked her a barrage of questions. She answered all of them clearly, and her body didn't seem any different either.

"...What a bluff."

Honestly, "I have erased Kuroha Imose?" We have the professor's invention on our side, so there's no way you could do that. If you want to pull something, just try it! No matter what you do, I'll protect Kuroha!

I was getting fired up inside, but Kuroha didn't know what was going on and asked, "More importantly, Onii-chan, what should we do...? I can't find Yuzu-san..."

After I had ran out of my room, Kuroha had also gone outside to search for Yuzu-san. She hadn't been able to find a trace of her, and eventually came back home.

"Don't worry. Yuzu-san is back in her room now. I found her, and we talked."

"...Huh?"

I recounted what had happened, and Kuroha seemed relieved from the bottom of her heart. Her eyes started tearing up.

"...Thank goodness... I didn't know what I would do if anything happened to Yuzu-san..."

Kuroha said she would go apologize to her, but I hurried and stopped her. Even if she wanted to talk, it would be best to leave her alone for tonight.

For now... both Yuzu-san and Kuroha were safe. I was still concerned about what RBUR-san had said, but we could take a breather for now. At least, that's what I thought... but I was naive.

Kuroha, with tears still in her eyes, nodded softly and looked straight at me. It was the most intense stare I had seen from her recently.

"...Onii-chan, thank you for this past month."

She'd caught me off guard, so my reaction was delayed.

".....What do you mean?"

"Let's just stop everything. This incident was my fault. If I was more rational, I wouldn't have hurt Yuzu-san like this. We can't just continue now that she's found out. Even I'm not that dumb."

She was trying to say that we should stop writing "LILSIS READ KANJI" together. Knowing Kuroha's personality, she would be the type to make this decision after an incident like this. Indeed, we

shouldn't continue doing something like this in secret considering Yuzu-san's feelings. But... that didn't mean it was all or nothing, right?

"Even if we stop playing WRITE-ON-THE-BODY, we can still write 'LILSIS READ KANJI' together. That's fine, right? Yuzu-san said she wanted us to continue, too."

"...No, that's just not right."

So you say, but the way I look at "LILSIS READ KANJI" is completely different now. It's no longer just my personal diary.

"I think of this as something the both of us are creating. You could call it our child."

"Child...? Don't say that, idiot..." She blushed and looked away.

If only Kuroha was the type to say, "You're right, I love you, Onii-chan! Let's have fun writing this book together!" then this issue would be resolved without a hitch. But my sister's brain was not built so simply, and so she slanted her eyebrows and continued apologizing.

"I caused trouble for you, too. I'm really sorry..."

Hey! Those aren't the words I want to hear! I won't let you call it quits after all this. I want to make this novel with you.

I was about to say something to try and persuade her, but then heard footsteps from the stairs. I glanced over to see Miru walking up the stairs, her cat-eared beret bouncing up and down. Her face was scrunched in a frown, seemingly displeased about something.

"Miru... Did we wake you up with the noise? I'm sorry."

"..."

Miru didn't even look back at Kuroha after hearing her apology. It was rare of her to completely ignore Kuroha, no matter how angry she was.

"Miru, you seem pretty upset. But if you want to be angry, direct it at me. I was the one being loud."

"I'm not angry."

"You're not? ...Oh, I see. Are you worried that we're arguing? We're not, don't worry. We're getting along just fine."

"...That's not it, either."

"...Then what is it?" I asked. That was when Miru raised her arm and pointed a finger at Kuroha. Then, in a suspicious tone of voice, she said something unexpected.

"...Nii, who is this woman?"



One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san! It's time for the Gai Odaira Hour!”

Transcript of “The Gai Odaira Hour” broadcast August 8th, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author)

Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/Illustrator)

“Letters from the Listeners Segment”

◆ “A Chuuni Japan”

The Japan of today is blessed with *moe*, the culture of beautiful 2D girls. But according to scholars, there was a chance that we could have gone down the path of *chuuni* culture. If Japan had become *chuuni*, what would the world have been like?

KUMAMOTO Prefecture, HISTORY☆ROMANTIC (12 years old)

Odaira: “Haruka-kun, let's demonstrate. There are different types of *chuuni*, but let's act out an easy example.”

Haruka: “Bring it on.”

Odaira: “The prime minister who also possesses the name Kokui no Saishou, aka Grand Minister of the Ashen Robes, Sumeragi Rinze, descended upon the National Diet Building, aka the Eden Parthenon, with flames burning in his indigo eyes.”

Haruka: “Sumeragi took his silver longsword, the Muramasa, from his waist and hoisted it above his head—”

Odaira: “And then solemnly declared: ‘We will raise the consumption tax.’”

Miru: “Why is his line so plain?”

Haruka: “Vezel Rouga Bionate, leader of the opposing party, the Dante Institution, looked on from the shadows with a visage like that of a departed spirit.”

Odaira: “Vezel opened a single eye as he chanted in despair. In that moment, the embodiment of the old grudge he bore against Sumeragi manifested as the flame <Phantom Flare>.”

Haruka: “The <Phantom Flare> scorched the air. Vezel's will—no, the will of the stone of wisdom, the Lucifer Crystal, enshrined underneath the Dante Institution's syndicate Neo Cathedral—engraved these words upon the wall of the Eden Parthenon: ‘Before raising

consumption taxes, consider restoring the health of the economy first.”

Miru: “If this is going to take this long, can I just go?”

Chapter 5: As One

Kuroha has been erased...
From everyone's memories!

Miru.

"Who are you? Don't act so close with Nii. I'll kill you."

Yuzu-san.

"Gin-san, good morning... U-Um, who might you be? Huh...?
Sister...? M-Mother, Father! Gin-san is acting strange...!"

Odaira-sensei.

"Gin-kun. You have your one and only sister in the form of Miru-chan, yet you insist that you have this old hag of a sister too?"

Amaneko-chan.

"Nii-sama, thank you for your call-nodesu! ...Huh? Do I know Kuroha? Geez, Nii-sama... You already know that both my underwear and swimsuits are kuro-ha (favor black)..."

When RBUR-san said that he had erased Kuroha, he didn't mean her physical being, but rather her existence from the minds of everyone around her.

Since she was being protected by the professor's invention, he couldn't lay a hand on Kuroha herself. RBUR-san had already figured that out, so instead he targeted everyone who knew her. Our parents, Yuzu-san, Miru, Odaira-sensei, her classmates, her teachers, Amaneko-chan, Amaneko-chan's grandfather... Kuroha had disappeared from everyone's memories.

But I didn't panic. We had the professor's invention on our side. I asked Sensei to wear the professor's panties on his head to bring back his memories. When I did this before, my memories returned, but... Sensei's memories didn't return.

"Why...?"

《...Anija PRepared for this. HE used a stronger form of memory manipulation than normal, ANd it cannot be undone so simply.》

...He got us.

I see... The reason he had brought the troops with him was to use a stronger power that he couldn't activate alone... Why was RBUR-san going this far?

《...Anija MIght be intending to use this as a negotiation tactic...》

—If you want all their memories to return, then do as I say.

WRUR-san suggested that he might contact me soon and give me such an offer.

In that case, should I wait until RBUR-san appears before me again? Should I give in and listen to what he says?

I imagined it. I would let RBUR-san manipulate my memories, and I'd end up walking down the "right path" of history. It was simply returning to the "original" route, so I couldn't say it was the wrong decision. But...

"No, I don't want to be forced to do that!"

It wasn't just my own future, but also Kuroha's that would be affected. No, not just us, but everyone around us, too. I wanted us to make our own decisions. And that's why we were going to meet our last remaining hope.

She was also being protected from their interference, so she would still remember Kuroha. I had called this morning and confirmed that.

"I see... So they pulled that trick, huh. Imose-kun, this is an emergency. This is no time to be going to school-noda. Let's form a plan. Take Kuro-chan with you and come to my lab-noda!"

Kuroha and I got on a train heading to TOKYO. She was sitting in the seat facing me. I spotted Mt. Fuji from the window, but the train went by so fast that it disappeared in a flash.

I felt like we had been in this situation before. We had gone to TOKYO with just the two of us like this. It was cloudy now, but besides that, it was almost exactly the same scene. *Hmm, that was...*

"Oh, I remember. It was when we went to meet Odaira-sensei for the first time."

"...That did happen, huh."

I tried my best to sound cheerful and looked toward Kuroha sitting opposite of me. She was staring down, looking depressed.

Of course she was. Everyone she knew had forgotten about her, so there was no way she could remain calm like that.

As the situation gradually made itself known starting from last night, Kuroha had become deeply distressed.

"...Onii-chan, what's going on? What's happening...?"

It pained me to see Kuroha trembling with her whole body like that, muttering in confusion.

I was really tempted to explain everything to her, but I chose not to. If I told her everything, she would definitely tell me to go down the "right path" of history. She would do as RBUR-san said. I wanted to keep that from happening.

We still had an ace up our sleeve, which was the professor. As long as we worked together, we could do something about this. I felt bad for Kuroha, but I wanted to resolve this without telling her the

truth.

It was hard to stay at home with the presence of our family, so I quickly packed up some of our belongings and ran away from home with Kuroha. I had my bankbook with me and a survival kit for emergencies.

“Nii, where are you going?”

“Gin-san, Um, that person... is very pretty... but what is your relationship with her? Where will you be going together?”

Miru and Yuzu-san had approached us while I was packing. I didn't have the time to explain everything to them, and even if I did, there's no way they would have believed me. I left a letter saying that I was going sightseeing with a friend, and forced us out of the house.

It was almost like... we were a pair of siblings eloping. In Orthodox literature, it was a common development for a brother and sister to join hands and run away from the opposition of those around them, usually their family. In a sense, that was us right now.

But the one we were running away from now was the “right path” of history.

Kuroha had barely spoken a word since boarding the train and seemed to be thinking about something. I had tried bringing up a few lighter things to talk about, but she hadn't said much in response.

That was understandable. *I guess we're staying quiet until we reach TOKYO...* I looked out at the cloudy sky from the window again, but then—

“Hey, Onii-chan...” Kuroha said in a weak voice.

“Hm?”

“It must be divine punishment for me to be forgotten by everyone.”

“Divine punishment?”

“Because I was doing all that.”

“...We were just writing a novel.” Why did she have to be punished for that?

“...” Kuroha didn't say anything more and languidly stared out the window.

...

Just writing a novel, huh...

It's true that we were just a brother and sister writing a novel together. Even though it felt like the relationship between us was definitely beyond that of ordinary siblings, and even though I was touching her skin every night... Neither of us had made any clear moves.

But I could no longer carelessly say something like, “I like (2D) *gimai*.” I had realized that those words were tormenting Kuroha's heart.

Even though we had yet to make the last push, it was almost scary how different our relationship was now compared to the first time we had gone to meet Odaira-sensei...

I gazed at Kuroha's graceful facial features, and then she suddenly closed her eyes.

"Onii-chan... I want to take a nap. Can you wake me up when we get to TOKYO?"

"Sure, I will."

We hadn't gotten a wink of sleep since last night, so she must be really tired now. We would reach TOKYO soon, but I should let her sleep until then.

Kuroha let out a weary sigh, then sank deeply into her seat. And then, with her eyes closed, she spoke a line that gorged my heart out.

"...Onii-chan, are you hiding anything from me?"

《...I PERceive your intentions.》

Do you understand me, WRUR-san?

I slightly panicked at Kuroha's sharp intuition, but replied with, "I'm not hiding anything," and she didn't say anything more. Soon afterward, I heard her breaths stabilize into a steady sleeping rhythm.

When Kuroha fell asleep, WRUR-san started talking to me from the inside of my pocket.

《JUST as you surmised, if YOU reveal everything to Kuroha Imose, she WOULD choose to walk down the "right path" of history. I HAVE only observed her for a short amount of TIME, but I can tell from HER personality.》

I figured... But to you, wouldn't it be more convenient if I went down the "right path" of history?

《Well, THAT is true. But YOU say that you don't want to erase us... IF possible, I wish to REach a conclusion that the both of us will be HAPPY with.》

The desire to not erase the Pantyhose Panty was gradually becoming stronger within me. After talking with WRUR-san like this, I had realized that humans and the Pantyhose Party could find common ground. If we just talked it out, I'm sure we could come up with a better solution...

The biggest obstacle was RBUR-san. He was purely focused on the "right path" of history.

《THE reason why Anija is so focused on THAT must be because of O(Earsh).》

The Japanese language originated from the kanji of China, then gradually developed into its own language. It was finally freed from the restrictions of traditional kanji, became the visual language known as O(Earsh), and eventually O(Earsh) conquered the world.

《IT was freed from THE influence of another country and became ORIGINAL, THEN that originality was recognized by the REST of the world. IT is a story that a nationalist like Anija finds worthy TO devote HIMSELF to.》

To RBUR-san, ○(Earsh) was not just any language. It was a symbol of his country, a symbol of his culture, and also a symbol of his kind, the Pantyhose Party.

《TO phrase it simply, IT is a symbol of civilization itself.》

So he was dedicated to protecting the course of history where kanji evolved into ○(Earsh). Literature gave birth to culture, which eventually evolved into civilization itself, and that course of events was incredibly important to him. RBUR-san had his own values, too...

《AND you were the one WHO caused it, “Great Father.” It is THE story you spun that gave birth to us and ○(Earsh).》

Hahah, though I still can't believe it. I'm just a high school boy who's confused about my relationship with my little sister. To think that my story would change the future...

...

...Hm? My story would change the future...

...

《WHAT's the matter?》

Hey, WRUR-san. I was thinking... The one who formed the future wasn't me, but my story, right?

《THAT's correct.》

In that case... it doesn't matter if I myself go down the “right path” of history, right? It shouldn't matter what kind of life I live, as long as ○(Earsh) and the future where you all are born is created, right?!

《...Anija aside, I am fine with THAT. But in the end, I DON't think you can separate YOurself from your story...》

The reason Kuroha was being targeted was because the very personal matter of who I get together with, and the enormous matter of the course of history, had become linked. *If I could somehow separate those two...*

...

I felt like I was on to something, but I still needed one more push. At times like these, I had to try the usual.

Hey, WRUR-san. There's something I like to do whenever I ponder about something. Can we try it?

《WHAT is it?》

Wearing pantyhose.

I took WRUR-san out of my pocket and put her on my head.

《WHa, eh, wait, what?! TO us, that is—》

As soon as I put on WRUR-san, I felt something flow into my head. It was probably our minds synchronizing somehow.

☐ 7 Δ ¯ · ∋ ∩ ⊙ ℵ ∥ ≧ ∑ ∴ ∂ ∇ ¾ ℙ ℓ † † ▵ ∽ · ☀ # ▼ ▼

《WE did all that together, SO it's only natural for me to be more

intimate with you~》

But even then, you seem so different..

《NYlon is easily burnable, so Pantyhose Party hearts easily burn as well!》

...

L-Let's put aside WRUR-san for now.

I needed to talk with the professor about what we should do after this. If I talked with her, I might finally be able to figure out that idea that felt like it's almost forming in my mind.

I looked at Kuroha, who was still sleeping silently.

—I'll protect you no matter what happens.

I pumped myself up and somehow managed to swallow down the oppressive anxiety that felt like it was crushing my chest.

It's going to be okay.

The professor would do something about this.

With the professor, we could figure out a way.

The professor was a genius. Unlike me, she was an authentic genius.

Right, as long as the professor...

—...

“...Who is this pretty lady-noda?”

But the devil was one step ahead of us.

We had arrived at Professor Choumabayashi's laboratory. That was the first thing she said after peeking her head out from the door.

I felt Kuroha gulp behind me. I was dumbfounded, just staring at the professor's childlike face.

“Hm?” Her big eyes sparkled as she looked up at me with hardly any concern.

No way, how?! The professor should have been protected from the Pantyhose Party's interference just like us! She still had her memories when I called this morning!

《...Gin-gin, um, YOu can use a stronger form of memory manipulation and physical manipulation if you're in COn tact with the subject. I THink they may have used THat to break Meguri Choumabayashi's guard...》

But... Wouldn't they try the same thing on us, then?

《THat alone won't break it down. There's ONe more condition. The TArget's mental state must be visibly unstable.》

...So the professor was emotionally unstable, and they caught her in that state?

“Professor, was there anything that upset you a lot today?”

The professor replied, “Good of you to ask,” and sighed

exaggeratedly. "I missed the preorder deadline for the game that I wanted to buy. I can't get the preorder bonus anymore. All I can do now is cry..."

...

So that was the reason she became emotionally unstable?

The professor looked curiously at Kuroha, who was standing still, and said, "What a beauty-noda," in admiration. *Damn it, she's completely forgotten about her...*

"...Professor, I have one question. Do you know what the Pantyhose Party is?"

"Pantyhose? Of course I do."

"Not just pantyhose, but the Pantyhose Party."

"Come on, stop with your silly untranslatable puns-noda. They're not very funny."

...Damn it. It wasn't just her memories of Kuroha that were erased, but of the Pantyhose Party too... I bit my lip and curled my hand into a fist.

The professor started saying stuff like, "Since you came all the way here to play, do you want to watch some anime? I got an old classic from the Heisei era from the archives. The two girls in the ending theme are pretty sexy..."

But her words were no longer registering in my head. The only things reflecting in my eyes at that point were the stifling cloudy TOKYO sky, and...

...Kuroha, who looked like she wanted to die.

The steadily trickling rain suddenly turned into a downpour. Since neither of us had umbrellas, we quickly fell victim to the rainfall. We hurried to take cover under the eaves of a building, but both of us were already soaked to the bone.

"We should have bought an umbrella. Should we wait it out here for the time being?" I asked.

"I guess so... Oh, did Mom reply to the message you sent her...?"

"Yeah. She said she'd trust me for now, but asked me to send regular updates. And... she said that the girl is stunningly beautiful, but 'don't rush into anything.'"

"...I don't know how to react to that..."

Judging by my mom's message, no one's memories of Kuroha had come back yet.

"Where should we go next? It's getting pretty late, so how about we find somewhere to eat dinner? I wonder what kind of local specialties there are in TOKYO..."

"...Sorry, I don't have any special requests..."

《Gin-gin, I want to go to SHIBUYA next!》

Sorry, WRUR-san. Can you be quiet when I'm talking with my sister?

《GEEZ, I got it. Gin-gin, you dummy.》

“Kuroha, is there anywhere you want to go?”

“...”

Kuroha seemed troubled. Of course she wouldn't be in the mood to go visit places in this situation. We had lost our pillar of support in the form of the professor.

《NOT much we can do now, Gin-gin. LET's go sightseeing in TOKYO,》 suggested WRUR-san, so we started wandering around through the streets. It went without saying that we weren't in the mood to sightsee, and I was still feeling restless about needing to do something. But I didn't have any ideas, and I felt like I'd go crazy if we just stood around.

We climbed the “TOKYO TOWER NEXIA,” bought some merchandise of the 2D prime minister Nyamo-chan in AKIHABARA, and visited the “Meguro Tentacle Museum.”

We also visited the museum that Odaira-sensei had taken us to once before. Unchanged from last time, there was a “Heisei Exhibit” on display, which showcased the pop culture that existed in that era.

There was a life-sized diorama that mimicked the daily life of an ordinary person. Just as before, there was a game on a screen displaying the words, “You should lose your 童貞 (doutei/virginity) to me, your little sister.” And just as before, I couldn't read it.

“What does this say again? I think I remember something about ‘virginity?’ What does ‘virginity’ mean?”

“I don't want to explain...”

When we had talked about this last time, Kuroha's face had turned red and she'd seemed kind of flustered, but now she just gave a hollow response. Her reaction to the same thing was so different depending on her mental state. *There is no way we can have a light-hearted conversation like this...* I stopped trying to talk with her and looked up at the rainy sky.

We had been driven into a corner. Was it impossible for us to break away from the “correct path” of history?

In orthodox literature, a brother and sister eloping would usually result in a happy ending. But in reality, it just meant that we were facing an even greater power.

RBUR-san had yet to contact us. He might just be tormenting us, jeering at us... making it clear to us that we were no match against the Pantyhose Party. Now that we had lost our trump card by name of the professor, there was nothing left that we could do... Outside of just one thing...

“...Onii-chan, there's one place I want to go.”

“Oh?”

“If you'll let me be a little selfish... I want to rest.”

Kuroha hugged her shoulders as if she were cold. She had

probably gotten chilled after being drenched in the rain.

Her wet hair was sticking to her cheeks, and droplets fell from her long eyelashes. An unwiped raindrop slid down the nape of her slender neck. Looking a bit further down, her white blouse was sticking to her skin, and through it, I could see her bare skin and bra

“...!”

I quickly looked away. Because I could feel myself getting heated.

That’s right. Of the methods I knew of to use against the Pantyhose Party, there was one thing I hadn’t tried yet.

It was the method the professor had repeatedly urged me to hurry up and do.

Kuroha was feeling hopeless.

We were in a deadlock.

In this case, the only thing left to do was to try this last option.

But if I did...

《AHH! Gin-gin, how mean! ARE you saying...》

It would erase the Pantyhose Party.

I hesitated. *Should I “lock down” the future like this or not...?* I wanted to keep my promise with WRUR-san. But I had no other ways to fight against RBUR-san...

“Onii-chan, um... I want to go somewhere with a shower and a place to lie down. Let’s think about what to do next after that.”

Kuroha was looking behind me as she talked. It seemed like she had already decided on a place.

“...Okay. Let’s buy dinner somewhere along the way, too.”

“Yeah...” Kuroha nodded somewhat nervously. I wondered why, so I looked in the same direction as her.

And as soon as I saw it, I got shaken up.

“...Uh, um, for now, I just think we should find the closest place we can to rest. A-As long as there’s a bath and bed, I’ll be fine,” she told me.

Both of our sights were on a hotel building where the outer walls were painted with a giant heart and a 2D girl.

Kuroha and I laid down next to each other on the spacious double bed. We had both changed into the yukata-like nightgowns that the hotel provided. WRUR-san was sleeping (*I think*) in the closet.

Life sure was strange. I would never have expected to come to this sort of hotel with my little sister. In older terms, it would be called a love hotel, and in Odaira-sensei’s words, a G-TITON hotel. The interior of the room was surprisingly simple. I had imagined it would be a little more sensual, so I felt a bit let down. The pink mood lighting was a little thrilling, though.

After we checked into the hotel, we each took a shower, ate dinner, and then talked about what we should do next. We couldn't come up with any ideas though, so we just decided to sleep for now.

"..."

"..."

I couldn't hear any sounds, but could tell that Kuroha was still awake. She must be really tired by now, but considering the situation, it was no surprise that she couldn't get to sleep...

"Onii-chan, you're still awake, right?"

"...Yeah."

Kuroha spoke up first. Both of us were looking up at the dim ceiling while we spoke.

"Hey... We said we'd just keep observing the situation for now, but... Onii-chan, do you really not know anything about what's going on?"

"Like I said before, I don't." A pang of guilt struck my chest.

"Yeah... I've been thinking hard about it, but this might be a mystery that I'm unable to solve."

"Not even the great detective Kuroha can crack this case?"

"It was a mystery when we traveled to the 21st century too, but... the cause was something that could be explained with logic, right? This time, I can't find any logical explanation or cause."

...There is a cause. I just haven't told you yet.

"...I wonder what it all means. Maybe it's the end of the world."

"No way, that's definitely blowing things out of proportion..."

"..."

Kuroha became silent.

Now that it'd come this far, I wanted to see everything through without giving Kuroha any needless information. I had two options...

One was to wait until RBUR-san came to us.

The other was to follow the professor's advice on what to do with Kuroha.

I glanced at Kuroha lying beside me. My heart skipped a beat at her pretty face, and a thought popped into my head.

—How does Kuroha feel about this?

By *this*, I mean... this situation where we're alone together on a hotel bed.

To be honest... my mind was going places. My heart wasn't pounding like crazy, but my chest felt tight, and tense.

Kuroha looked calm on the outside, but... what was actually on her mind?

"...I thought it was all over."

"...Huh?"

There had been a long pause since the last part of our

conversation, so I didn't know what she was talking about.

"It should have been all over... but why is Onii-chan lying in the same bed as me...?"

"...That's because you said you wanted to rest."

"That's not what I mean."

Reading between the lines... She must be talking about how she thought things were all over after Yuzu-san found out about us, and yet we were alone together like this now.

With a tense expression, Kuroha asked, "Hey, Onii-chan. What about Yuzu-san? Are you sure you want to leave her alone?"

"...She was pretty shocked at first, but seemed optimistic after we talked last night. She said it would be a long battle."

"...I see. Yuzu-san really is strong..."

"And she's forgotten about you right now, so she's probably also forgotten about all the things between us..."

"In a sense, that might make her happier."

...I wanted to say that that wasn't the case, but I couldn't.

"...Geez, Onii-chan, you're such an idiot. Why are you with me right now?"

"Why, you ask...?"

"A normal person would want to be with Yuzu-san. Someone as bright and beloved as her... there's no one else like her."

"It's true that Yuzu-san is a good person. But you're a good person, too. Don't put yourself down so much. And considering the situation, I think it's more normal to be by your side."

"..."

Kuroha looked down.

"I should never have made that suggestion in the first place. You should have been having fun together with everyone else. I received divine punishment for trying to do things behind everyone's backs, and should have been forgotten by everyone to reflect on my actions alone. But in that case, why? Why—"

Kuroha's voice was shaking.

"Why are you the only one who remembers me, Onii-chan...?"

"..."

The reason I remembered Kuroha was because I was immune to the Pantyhose Party's powers, but I couldn't tell her that.

As I remained silent, Kuroha mumbled, "It's your fault, Onii-chan."

"Wha...?"

"I'm about to go crazy. Everyone's forgotten about me..."

“Yeah,” I responded. “There’s no helping going crazy in this case...” but Kuroha shook her head.

“That’s not it. The reason I’m going crazy is... Even at a time like this, you’re the only one who hasn’t forgotten about me, so it makes me think about how special we must be.”

Tears started forming in the corners of her eyes as she grew more and more emotional.



“When Yuzu-san found us out, I thought it was all over, but I was fine with that. Onii-chan would go to the person he’s supposed to be with... I was thankful that it was before anything serious happened between us, but then...”

Oh, that’s right. Even though we’d come all this way, we haven’t even started yet. It was all so absurd...

“But you’re still by my side now, Onii-chan. How can I give up now...? It was me who suggested that we come to a place like this. What are you going to do about it?”

“...”

Kuroha was becoming more intense, riled up by her own words.

“I’m going to go insane like this. I’m going to become a pathetic woman who can’t live without you. And if that happens, it’ll be all your fault. Because you’re still with me!”

“You aren’t pathetic.”

Kuroha ignored my all too mediocre response.

“I already couldn’t think about anything but you recently... I’m pathetic... It’s too late, I’m already totally pathetic... I don’t know what to do anymore. I just don’t. Onii-chan, you idiot!”

Kuroha flung her outburst of emotions at me. It took all I had to accept her words, much less give her any sort of considerate response. But I had to say something... *What should I say?* As I struggled to find the right words within me, Kuroha muttered, “Idiot,” then clung onto me.

I was taken aback by the suddenness, but didn’t move away. She brought her face to my chest.

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

She repeated.

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

“Onii-chan, you idiot.”

She kept repeating. But then...

“Onii-chan... I love you.”

“—!”

For just a moment, the world sparkled.

Or maybe the world broke.

I looked at Kuroha with a dumbfounded expression.

...She said it... She finally clearly said it...

No, she had actually said it before. But WRUR-san had intervened

that time, made our memories fuzzy, and in Kuroha's mind, she hadn't said it back then.

But this time, it was different.

Kuroha said it clearly, while in contact with me.

There was nothing interrupting us. There was no way for me to misunderstand or mishear.

"...Kuroha."

She took in a breath after I earnestly said her name. She had a stunned expression on her face.

"I... said it..."

"And I heard it..."

She came to her senses.

"Onii-chan, um..."

"I heard you clearly. I won't let you take it back or anything."

Her mouth was slightly ajar, her lips quivering.

"...I-It's gross, isn't it? Y-You'd normally be freaked out if you found out that a family member who you've always lived with has always thought that way about you... I keep calling you a pervert, but I was the bigger pervert all along..."

"When you say 'always,' how long has it been?"

"...Huh? I-I'm not sure, probably since grade school..."

"I-I see..."

"A-Are you grossed out?" Kuroha's voice was barely audible.

"I'm not. I just thought that it's been quite a while."

"I might have the disposition of a stalker... I'm sorry for falling in love with you."

Why is my little sister like this? Why is she saying sorry right after confessing to me? And why is it that when she takes that attitude, it makes me want to hug her so much?

"Onii-chan..." Kuroha looked up at me anxiously.

"Kuroha... Thank you."

"Huh?"

I mean, with this, we can take the next step.

"..."

"..."

We looked at each other silently. I could feel our hearts thumping. Not just mine, but Kuroha's too, since she was sticking so close to me.

Ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump...

As I zoned in to our heartbeats, I felt my mind going numb.

I thought about what the professor has repeatedly urged me to do.

It was finally time.

Kuroha, seemingly sensing my mood, blushed bright red and stayed silent.

Until now, I could never make the final decision and stopped right before the line, but in the end, it wasn't about logic. I kept telling myself to not give in to the flow, to make the final decision under a sound mind... I had tried to act smart about it, but in the end, I couldn't fight against the impulses bubbling within me.

I drew closer to Kuroha. Doing so, the tops of our feet touched. Of course, she was no longer wearing black pantyhose, so her feet were bare right now.

“...”

I suddenly remembered WRUR-san inside the closet. If I “locked down” the future, WRUR-san might disappear. I would break my promise with her.

But... I knew this was low of me, but Kuroha's emotions had pierced through me, and my head was filled with nothing but her right now. To be honest, this wasn't about me trying to protect her by using the method the professor suggested, but just about me wanting Kuroha. All sense of reason was melting away and seeping out of me right now. I couldn't think about anything other than Kuroha.

I put strength into my hand that was wrapped around Kuroha's back. It was a signal of what I wanted.

“...”

She averted her gaze, embarrassed.

Was she refusing me? I worried for a moment, but then in contrast to her hesitant expression, she wrapped both her arms around my back.

“Onii-chan...”

Kuroha hugged me close. Her breasts squished against my chest. The soft sensation made the blood rise in my head even more.

Her lips were right before my eyes—her slightly thin but shapely light pink lips. I began to draw my own lips closer.

If our lips touched, Kuroha and I would embark into uncharted territory. That path was about to open before us.

Not in literature. But in real life.

I was about to...

Become one with my little sister.

The next morning.

This might be a cliché as old as literature itself, but picture sparrows chirping outside as the morning sun peeked in through the curtains.

I woke up before Kuroha, who was sleeping beside me. Maybe due to my poor sleeping habits, the comforter had dropped to the floor, and I could see Kuroha's round butt as she slept facing the other way. It was covered by her nightgown, but I could clearly see its shape.

“...”

I recalled what happened last night and felt my head grow hot. This wasn't something to be thinking about first thing in the morning...

I picked up the comforter and draped it over Kuroha, then left the bed and opened the door to the closet. I had shut WRUR-san in here last night, but she—

«Gin-gin, good morning... GEez, you're always shutting me away in places...»

—had not disappeared.

«SINCE I still exist, that must mean... YOu failed to mate. THAT must be the case.»

To mate...? What a direct way of putting it. But no one said anything about failing.

«NO way! You didn't fail?! I'M curious, GIVE me the details! IF you don't, I'll cry!»

Cry all you want, but that's staying a secret.

Since the Pantyhose Party still existed, it meant the future hadn't changed.

It wasn't just because WRUR-san was still here, but there was something else that told me that the other Pantyhose Party members were still alive and well.

I looked at a piece of paper stuck to the wall of the room.

COME TO THE ROOFTOP OF THE TOWER OF CULTURE —RBUR PANTYHOSE

.....

It's bad manners to sneak into the sleeping place of siblings, RBUR Pantyhose-san!

«NO way... Anija came here? I didn't notice since I WAS sleeping... Come to the Tower of Culture, it says... WHAT are you going to do, Gin-gin...?»

I looked over at Kuroha's innocent sleeping face.

To protect Kuroha, and to finish writing our novel together, I had to settle this with RBUR-san. So—

“I'll go.”

«But...»

It's true that we were at a major disadvantage. We might have no choice but to listen to RBUR-san's demands and give in to them.

But I wasn't just going to go in without a plan. Last night, right before falling asleep, I came up with an idea. If RBUR-san could get on

board with this idea, or...

《IDEA? What is it?》

That's—

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san! It's time for the *Gai Odaira Hour*!”

Transcript of “The Gai Odaira Hour” broadcast September 1st, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author)

Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/Illustrator)

“Letters from the Listeners Segment”

◆”Romance with 2D characters”

I am a government employee of a certain prefecture. In my department, the only men are me and a temp worker. For women, there are two humans and five 2D characters. It's a female-dominant workplace.

All of the 2D employees are equipped with advanced AI. Recently, one of them confessed to me and we started dating. But I've only dated 3D women until now, so I don't know how to go about a relationship with a 2D woman. I would appreciate it if you could give me any pointers.

NAGANO Prefecture, STILL☆PERKY (55 years old)

Odaira: “A prefecture employee, huh. A lot of government workers are in relationships with 2D characters.”

Haruka: “A lot of the 2D characters with advanced AI are government employees, so it is only natural.”

Odaira: “From the perspective of an old man like me, marriage with a drawing on a piece of paper with no AI is closer to true *nijikon* (Translator's note: marriage with a 2D character) and gets me more excited.”

Haruka: “Enough with that, give this listener your advice.”

Odaira: “There's not much of a difference between 2D and 3D women. Don't get angry with them if they want to be a little selfish or if something bothers you. The most important part is to be open-minded enough to forgive anything.”

Haruka: “Open-minded... What a rarely sensible thing for you to say. Oh, there's actually more to this letter.... ‘By the way, I'm the third

man she had gone out with...”

Odaira: “...”

Haruka: “...”

Odaira & Haruka: “Out! Throw that rotten slut out!”

Miru: “Your open-mindedness is thinner than a pair of panties.”

Chapter 6: The Children

The Tower of Culture was built as a symbol of friendship between the Special Cultural District and Outer Japan. Sitting about halfway across the ARIAKE BRIDGE, it stood tall amidst the ocean breeze.

This tower was, so to speak, the final battleground. We had accepted RBUR-san's invitation and arrived at the Tower of Culture. Of course, I hadn't told Kuroha about the memo. All I said was that we were continuing our sightseeing from yesterday.

I hid how nervous I was, acted calm, and looked around inside the tower, which housed a museum.

"Kuroha, I'm going to the bathroom. Go ahead and look around on your own." I added that my stomach hurt, so it might be a while.

"Is it that bad? Are you okay...?" Kuroha looked worried. I wanted to take care of this as quickly as possible and return to her side.

...But that was up to the other party.

"—Right, RBUR Pantyhose-san?"

《Oh. SO you came alone... "Great Father."》

《Anija! I'M here too!》

We were on the barren rooftop of the Tower of Culture.

I had left Kuroha behind inside the tower and came up to the roof by myself. RBUR-san was likewise waiting for me alone like a man, or rather a pantyhose. There was no sign of any other person or pantyhose around.

The air between us was tense, but that was to be expected. The outcome that RBUR-san and I were hoping for was different, after all. Despite that...

"RBUR Pantyhose-san, please listen to what I have to say. I have an idea."

I tried to start a discussion between us. Humans and Pantyhose Party could communicate. We could empathize with each other. According to WRUR-san, we could even have sexual intercourse. We should have every reason to be able to come to a mutual understanding. But RBUR-san...

《OH "Great Father," Gin Imose. LET me say this one more time. Let me MANipulate your memories AND return you to your NOrmal daily life.》

《Anija, PLease listen to THE "Great Father!"》

《SILence, you failure of a sister! NOT only did you fail your mission, YOur even were lured to their side! I am ashamed AS your brother!》

《Anija!》

《YOur are no sister of mine!》

《N-No...》

.....

《OH “Great Father,” I understand why you would resist us. BUT I implore you, do not bring your personal emotions into this. LOk at it from a larger perspective.》

“A larger perspective?”

《IT is for the sake of this country.》

RBUR-san finally started talking to me about his beliefs. What was it that had revived his motherland, which had once fallen to ruin? What was it that demonstrated influence over the entire world, and returned the country’s pride? It was the symbol of the Pantyhose Party, the Denierians, and their culture—○(Earsh). He wanted to protect it. It was for the sake of this country.

《It is much more important than the feelings of a single person.》

“...I’m sure there aren’t many other prime ministers throughout history who love their country as much as you do.”

《I take pride in that.》

It was admirable, I thought. He was thinking for the sake of many, many more people than I was, as a mere high school student. *But... Sorry, I can’t just give in. I can’t wholeheartedly agree with you. After all...*

RBUR-san had probably guessed what I was thinking from the look in my eyes.

《...I SEE. Oh “Great Father.” I AM very disappointed. Once before, when ASked to choose between “literature” or “little sister,” YOU answered “little sister.” I had wished that YOur answer was a lie, BUT your actions now are proving that it was the truth.》

Ahh... Now I remember. That’s what I had answered back at the hotel during summer vacation. In the heat of the moment, I remembered saying, *“I would choose my little sister.”*

《WHY would you abandon THIS grand matter and focus on SUC h little things? PERsonal matters are irrelevant IN the face of carrying out JUSTice.》

I see... I guess what he is saying makes sense.

But I wanted to ask him this.

“RBUR-san, you keep saying personal feelings don’t matter, but can you really do everything by yourself?”

《WHat?》

“Literature—No, it’s not just literature. It can be about creating

anything. I'm still just a high school student... But there's one thing I'm sure of from observing my parents and the people around me."

《AND what is that?》

"You can't create anything by yourself."

《...ARE you trying to convince me with SUCH childish ideals?》

"It's not just ideals. This is your plain old standard argument. I guess the prime minister of the 38th century isn't such a big deal after all, if I have to explain this?"

《.....》

"I mean, isn't that the case? Say my novel really did create the future! Then how should I write that novel? All of the novels I've experienced until now would become the foundation for me to start writing. It's built up with support. No matter how great of a literary master someone might be—there's absolutely no way they could have written it by themselves!"

RBUR-san was silent.

"My father is a linguist. He always says this—'If it wasn't for your mom, I wouldn't be here right now.' And that he'll probably feel that way even more at the time of his death."

《WHAT is your point?》

"I'm asking if there's anyone important to you!"

You said something so harsh to your little sister! That makes me angry!

"I don't want to hear about justice or morals from someone who doesn't even treasure his little sister!"

《.....》

《Gin-gin... DON't yell at Anija any more than this. I'M sure Anija has his own thoughts.》

"...If you say so, WRUR-san..."

I calmed myself, but in contrast, RBUR-san let out an angry roar.

《I TRIED hearing you out, but it was just meaningless talk...! YOU must walk down the "right path" of history. FOR the sake of THIS country.》

RBUR-san's voice grew deeper.

This was bad. I was hoping to talk it out and meet halfway, but got roiled up and yelled at him instead. I was supposed to be the Sun here, not the North Wind. I had a bad feeling about this...

And that's when it happened.

I heard a ding from the elevator behind me.

Huh? I thought and turned around, and then many familiar faces came out of the elevator.

"Nii-sama!" "Gin-san!"

"...Why are you all here...?"

Amaneko-chan, Yuzu-san... Miru, Odaira-sensei, the professor...

“Hey there, Gin-kun. For some reason I had a feeling that I had to call up everyone and bring them here.” Sensei laughed lightheartedly in his little girl form.

...I see, so RBUR-san had controlled Sensei.

They looked at me first, then looked at RBUR-san.

“—?!”

There was a pair of pantyhose hovering in the air, so... of course it would cause an uproar.

“Th-The heck is that?! It’s a flying pantyhose!”

“Nii, I know how much you love pantyhose, but you didn’t have to go that far.”

.....

I glared at RBUR-san and uttered, “...What are you planning?”

《...NOW then, who shall I pick first?》

“Like I asked! What are you planning to—”

《I CAN let you pick, too. WHO will be erased first, that is.》

“—?!”

So that was it...

It was such a simple threat.

《Anija, please! JUST listen to what he has to say!》

《Silence. YOU imbecile.》

I clenched my hand into a fist. I was vexed. This was so vexing, I felt the blood rising to my head. But there’s no way I could trade everyone’s lives for my personal feelings...

I suddenly imagined the face of Kuroha, slightly blushing. *After this... I guess there’s no more future for me and Kuroha. We won’t be able to write the novel together anymore...* I didn’t want that... I didn’t want that, but...

I responded to RBUR-san, grinding my teeth.

“I... understand... I’ll listen to you and have my memories manipulated...”

“That won’t be necessary-noda.”

《—?!》

“Huh?!”

Both RBUR-san and I gasped.

Before we noticed, the professor had a pair of panties in her hand and approached RBUR-san—

“I caught you!”

She put the panties on him!

《N-NO way. WHY you little—! GYAAaaah!》

RBUR-san squirmed around after having the panties put on him, but it seemed that his powers were already sealed, and he dropped straight to the ground. I couldn't believe what had just happened before my eyes, and blinked.

“What's going on...?”

In contrast to my dumbfounded expression, the professor grinned in satisfaction.

“Ahahah, Imose-kun. Sorry I fooled you-noda.”

“Professor... Could it be that your memories weren't manipulated...?”

“That's right-noda. I just pretended that my memories had been wiped-noda!”

“What about being in shock from missing the preorder for that game?”

“That sure was a shock-noda. But I can just buy the preorder bonus secondhand!”

“.....”

The professor's guard hadn't been broken. She figured out that the Pantyhose Party was trying to manipulate her memories, so she turned the tables and pretended that her memories had been wiped. Her goal was to wait for an opportunity to get in contact with RBUR-san.

“You really are a schemer, Professor...”

I could feel all the weight being lifted off my shoulders.

The professor picked up the limp RBUR-san and sneered, “It's the end of the road for you-noda.”

《STOP, stop! I am the prime minister of the FUture!》

.....

We hadn't resolved everything yet, but the most looming danger had finally been dealt with.

We had caught RBUR-san, but his countless number of troops were still alive and well. It seemed that they were lying in hiding watching us, so I didn't let down my guard. But for now, we had the upper hand.

“You hear me! If you don't want your prime minister to be torn to shreds, then return everyone's memories now-noda!”

The professor raised up RBUR-san and yelled out, and immediately afterwards I sensed something shifting about around us. After a brief second, everyone but the professor and I shone with a spark of light.

“...Amaneko-chan, do you know Kuroha?”

“Of course I do-nodesu. She's just a *gimai* sub-heroine!”

“Sensei, who's my other little sister besides Miru?”

“If we're talking about the physical world, that would be Kuroha-

kun. I'm not sure about your mental world, though."

...Thank god, it seemed like everyone's memories had returned. According to WRUR-san, the troops were headed to return the memories of Mom and Dad, as well as everyone else they had erased the memories of. Everything would return to normal before long.

After that, everyone surrounded the immobile RBUR-san, poked him, tugged on him, and admired him like an exotic animal at the zoo.

《S-STOP! How rude—! WHO do you think I am—!》

《Anija...》

WRUR-san was worried about RBUR-san, so I took her out of my pocket and placed her next to him. Siblings are best together.

On that note, RBUR-san was no longer able to talk thanks to the sealing powers of the panties, but everyone had come in direct contact with him, so his "contact communication" ability had been activated. As long as we were close by, we'd be able to hear what he said in our minds.

《DON't touch me, I'll get stretched out. H-HEy!》

"Miru-chan, it's a talking pantyhose. I feel like I'm dreaming, so can you pinch my cheeks?"

"There."

"?! Gyaaahh! That was a seriously painful pinch, but I'm happy you did it, Miru-chan! I'm gonna leak!"

The air around us was so warm, the tension from just earlier felt like a dream.

I stepped away for a moment and mumbled to myself.

"Is it all over now...?"

"No. It's not done yet-noda."

The professor appeared next to me with a stern expression.

"Hey, Imose-kun. Why are they still around? Have you not gone all the way with Kuro-chan yet? Hurry up and lock down the future-noda."

"No, well, we did... do it..."

"Wha, you did?! H-How was it?"

The professor was suddenly brimming with curiosity.

"...I missed."

"...? Do you mean it didn't go well? How so?"

Y-You don't have to ask.

RBUR-san raised his voice, maybe having overheard us.

《GRRR. Curse you, Meguri Choumabayashi! THIS country must walk down the "right path"... What will happen to the rich culture of traditional Japan?! WHat about ○(Earsh)?! What ABOut Japan itself?! ARE you okay with that, as a Japanese citizen YOUrself?!》

“Ahahah, you sure prattle a lot about Japan and Japanese people even though you’re a pantyhose. I’m sick of it. You need to be tossed to the side like a pair of pantyhose should.”

The professor didn’t even bother to lend RBUR-san an ear. She seemed to have decided that the Pantyhose Party was different from her. She even said that it was “strange” for RBUR-san to talk so passionately about this country.

And then—

《Hey, Gin-gin... Gin-gin, DO you think we’re strange...?》 WRUR-san asked me with a pained voice.

.....

Yeah, I know. RBUR-san wasn’t the only one I had to discuss things with.

“Professor, please hear me out.”

“Hm...? What is it?”

“I... think I want to choose a future where they won’t be erased.”

The professor responded, “What?” and furrowed her eyebrows.

“Why? 2D culture is going to disappear because of these things-noda.” She couldn’t agree with me, and instead argued back.

The professor had talked about how much she loved 2D culture. Like Kuroha, she didn’t have many friends when she was little, but anime and games soothed her heart. She went as far as to become a professor to figure out how to travel to the 2nd dimension, so her attachment to 2D culture was definitely not something to be taken lightly.

“I’d regret it if the wonderful traditions of Japan were to die off like that-noda.”

“I understand how you feel, but... Japan’s culture isn’t just limited to 2D culture. For example, the culture of the future would be considered traditional and respectable to them!”

“You say that, but... they’re pantyhose.”

“What’s wrong with being pantyhose? They’re our descendants!”

“Hey...” The professor was speechless, her mouth half-open.

But then, she took on a stern expression again.

“You know... I haven’t confirmed this with my own eyes, so I never told this to you. But thanks to these things... humanity itself will go extinct.”

“—?!”

What did she say...? Humans... will go extinct?

“The cause is the cleaning agent that the Pantyhose Party started spraying.”

RBUR-san had proudly stated as much back at the hotel. That in

the future, they were exterminating plants deemed harmful using a cleaning agent developed in Japan. He'd said that while the cleaning agent had minor effects on the ecosystem, it didn't exterminate any species completely...

《Gin-gin, I'M sorry. They won't become extinct immediately, but... THE cleaning agent apparently reduces human reproductive abilities just slightly, SO after a few thousand years...》

Did you know about that?

《I'M sorry...》

.....

If I were to choose a future where the Pantyhose Party exists, it would mean that humanity would go extinct in the distant future. And that decision would be made by me.

"Imose-kun. It would be painful for me if the vast 2D culture were to die out. I don't really care either way about the destiny of humanity, but I guess it'd be better if they survived-noda."

"..."

"Also, if something I loved so much were to disappear... I would start feeling empty about creating things in the first place."

"Creating things?"

The professor looked toward Odaira-sensei, who was grinning and poking RBUR-san.

"For example, Odaira-sensei's literature."

Then she pointed at Yuzu-san, who smiled while watching them.

"For example, your beloved book, *I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby*."

And then lastly, she pointed at her own chest.

"For example, my inventions. ...Would all those things be lost? Would they just disappear? Even if we created things, would they just vanish with the times? Are we trying so hard to create things that will become nothing one day?"

"....."

"I want them to survive. If I don't think that way, I won't be able to create things."

.....

I understood how the professor felt. Anyone would feel sad if the things they liked disappeared. *"Everything you create will be lost."*—If a creator was told that, it would only be natural for them to feel empty inside.

However... Old things mercilessly disappear with time.

To give an example—the ○(Earsh) that RBUR-san was so proud of would also disappear one day.

I heard this from WRUR-san. Since the Pantyhose Party possessed

the power of “contact communication,” one day, a society without words at all would come about.

Long, long ago: There was no language
Very long ago: Hieroglyphs and the like
Now: English, Japanese, many languages
Future: ○(Earsh)
Further in the future: Language itself will be lost

If you put it like this, ○(Earsh) was similar to hieroglyphs. The language of this world first developed from picture-like hieroglyphs, then branched out into many different kinds of languages, then eventually converged back into its original form. In that case, what would come next?

《Gin-gin, language IS also a living thing.》

For example with humans, everyone looked similar when they were babies. Their individual differences started forming as they became adults. As they grew even older, their individuality got obscured again, and then finally, they died.

○(Earsh) was a matured language—you could say it was language in its final form. What lay past that was just for it to die out.

After hearing that, I concluded that it was destiny for things to vanish from this world, the oldest being the first to go.

Using the Japanese language as an example—first kanji disappeared, and then in the future, hiragana and katakana would also disappear. And then further off, symbol writing would disappear—words themselves would be lost. And that wasn’t strange at all. It was just the flow of time.

“In that case...”

I realized. For 2D culture to be lost, and for humanity itself to go extinct, was just natural.

Of course, that would mean literature would also be lost. Words themselves would disappear, so the letters that formed stories would go away. The Pantyhose Party seemed to be preserving things, but one day, no more new stories would be written with letters. Everything would be lost...

—“*I want them to survive. If I don’t think that way, I won’t be able to create things.*”

So does that mean everything we’re doing now is meaningless? The sentences I’m forming character by character are just temporary?

Is literature worthless, is it futile?

—*Does it have meaning?* The professor was asking me that with her

big eyes looking my way.

Then I would answer. *There is meaning, Professor.*

Because in place of what disappears, something new is born!

I thought of WRUR-san in my pocket. These Pantyhose Party were our descendants. They were born from my pen, my beloved children. This was the power of literature.

I don't think we had to leave behind everything right now as-is. Even if it meant destroying something current in its place, creating something new was a wonderful thing.

"Professor, I think there's meaning in things disappearing. There are people who will succeed us, after all."

"Succeed... What are the pantyhose succeeding from us? The world of the future is completely different."

"RBUR-san loves this country, and his little sister WRUR-san loves her brother for that. Don't you think that's very human? That's already enough."

"..."

"Professor. The old should quietly leave and give way for the new. We shouldn't try to alter the future for our own egos. If we do, we're just the same as Mr. Bedhead—your older brother."

The professor took in a breath, but didn't comment.

"...So that's your answer-noda."

"Yes."

"....."

The professor thought for a while with a complicated expression, then spoke.

"Hmm. I really don't like being put on the same level as Aniki..."

She muttered, then changed her tone and laughed.

"I understand-noda. If that's what you insist, then I'll listen. After all, I'm just a mere scientist and a young girl. It feels weird for me to get all serious about this. Ahahahaha."

《...Gin-gin...》 WRUR-san said, sounding touched.

"But... we still have to guarantee Kuro-chan's safety!"

"Yes!"

The professor smiled, almost yelling when she said that. It was a very loud voice... And that was bad.

"What do you mean, my safety...?"

—!

Both the professor and I looked beside us. Kuroha had come to the rooftop without us realizing.

Crap. I was so lost in conversation that I hadn't noticed...

She quickly paced over to me with a pale expression.

“Hey, Onii-chan, what is all this?! What’s going on?!”

Her voice was high strung as she pointed to everyone and RBUR-san. Everyone was taken aback by her sudden appearance, and all of them looked at me.

“...I thought something was strange. You were hiding something from me after all, weren’t you?”

“Kuroha... I...”

I was an idiot. I could have just played dumb, but I couldn’t.

Kuroha drew her face close to me.

“Why? Why didn’t you tell me anything? ...Am I the cause of something?!”

“...”

“Looks like I’m right...”

“Kuro-chan, I was the one who made Imose-kun keep it a secret-noda. This wouldn’t have happened in the first place if I wasn’t so careless. If you want to blame someone, blame me...”

Kuroha ignored the professor’s words, walked away from us and toward everyone else, and picked up RBUR-san.

“What is this pantyhose?”

And then, the “contact communication” activated with Kuroha.

《HELLO there.》

“—?!”

Kuroha threw RBUR-san out of surprise.

“Wh-What is this...? I heard someone talk in my head...”

《IT is my “Contact Communication” ability.》

Kuroha was dumbstruck.

“...What are you...?”

Kuroha’s memories were still sealed, so she didn’t remember the Pantyhose Party.

《TO put it simply, I am from the future. I AM from the 38th century.》

“The 38th century...”

Kuroha suddenly looked over at the professor. She had once mentioned going to the 38th century and said something about the Pantyhose Party, so she must have remembered that.

She seemed wary, but then asked RBUR-san,

“...This is related to the current incident, right? What do you know...?”

This was bad. Kuroha, no! Don’t listen to RBUR-san!

《Indeed. Thanks to you, the future is straying from the “right path.” ○(Earsh) will not be born, WE will not be born, and Japan itself will fall to ruin. OH, what a terrible, terrible thought.》

The professor yelled out, “Stop-noda!” in a sharp voice, but RBUR-

san continued.

《...YOU are going to take the happiness away from Yuzu Mirokuin. ON the “right path” of history, Yuzu Mirokuin would be partnered with the “Great Father,” Gin Imose.》

“Wha—” “My!”

Kuroha and Yuzu-san looked at each other.

“Does that...” “...”

Their expressions changed in a flash.

Oh no... They knew everything now.

“Onii-chan, did you know...? And the professor, too...?”

The professor and I looked away.

“I see, so that’s why...”

Kuroha’s face became strained.

“Why are you such an idiot, Onii-chan? Just leave someone like me and go be with Yuzu-san! Ahh, how stupid. It’s all so stupid.”

Tears started forming in her eyes.

“I see... So Onii-chan was supposed to end up with Yuzu-san after all. That’s the ‘right path...’”

Her voice was shaking.

“Our parents would be against it. I would steal Yuzu-san’s happiness. And that’s not all, even history itself is against me and Onii-chan... There’s no helping it... No matter how you look at it, Yuzu-san is the better choice...”

“Kuroha, wait! Don’t be swayed by the ‘right path.’ We’re the ones who should decide what the future will hold!”

But none of my words were reaching her anymore.

Kuroha suddenly gazed at Yuzu-san, in tears.

“Yuzu-san, you too... Hurry up and take Onii-chan for yourself!”

“K-Kuroha-san...”

Yuzu-san was overwhelmed by Kuroha’s rage, but responded.

“Kuroha-san. It’s true that I love Gin-san. If I could take him, I would. But... There’s something I’ve been wondering for a while now. Kuroha-san, is it okay for you to not explain that thing to Gin-san?”

...That thing? What thing?

“Gin-san is still misunderstanding. If I were to take Gin-san in this state, I wouldn’t feel right...”

“Whatever. I don’t care...”

Kuroha briskly walked up to Amaneko-chan.

“Hey, what’s the Special Cultural District like?”

Amaneko-chan had been blankly watching the events unfold until now, but she snapped back into it.

“Eh? ...It’s a conservative, exclusionist, awful place...”

“I see. ...But it might be just the right place for a hard-headed girl

like me.”

“What do you mean-nodesu?”

“I’m leaving home. I’ll live by myself somewhere like the Special Cultural District.”

“—?! Kuroha!” “Kuroha-san!”

Both Yuzu-san and I called out her name.

“Yuzu-san. Take care of Mom, Dad, and Miru... and Onii-chan... for me. I know I’ll make you all worry, but I can’t be in that house anymore. I’m sorry...”

Her words were less addressed to Yuzu-san and more an empty soliloquy.

Kuroha ignored us and headed back to the elevator. But her legs were unsteady, and she fell to the floor after a few steps.

I can’t let Kuroha go off alone!

I headed toward her—and that’s when it happened.

《Now!》RBUR-san suddenly yelled out. Then, the pantyhose that Kuroha was wearing gave off a bright light.

What? I thought, then in the next moment—

Kuroha disappeared.

The only thing that remained was a single pair of floating black pantyhose...

I blinked several times. Kuroha was supposed to be right there, but she wasn’t. I couldn’t take in what I just saw...

《Gin-gin, THat’s the (female) leader of the troops, ETUR Pantyhose...》

The troops...

《ETUR Pantyhose disguised herself as Kuroha Imose’s stockings. SHE waited for an opening when Kuroha Imose’s emotions became unstable...》

Not only did she plant herself there, she even planned out an attack using body manipulation. When they tried the same thing on the professor, she wasn’t actually that mentally unstable so it didn’t work, but they succeeded with Kuroha...

《ETUR Pantyhose is the most powerful OF all his troops...》

《Ahahahaha, IT was worth it for me to convince the earlier generations of the Imose family to create the black stockings tradition!》

Did you really have to explain the MacGuffin like that?! More importantly... I was stunned.

Kuroha had... physically vanished?

.....

《ETUR, you did well. NOW then, Gin Imose. If you want to bring

Kuroha Imose back, listen to what I have to say.》

“You damn pantyhose... Imose-kun, forget these things...”

The professor grabbed RBUR-san and tried to tear him.

《IF you kill me, Kuroha Imose will not return.》

“Tch...”

《Anija, please calm down! Gin-gin says he has an idea!》

《Shut up. DO you think I would believe THat?》

And then, a timid-sounding voice interrupted the conversation.

《...UM, Prime Minister RBUR.》

It was a husky female voice. That must have been ETUR
Pantyhose-san.

《What is it?》

《...IT was not possible for me to break her guard after all... I WAS
unable to maintain the link with Kuroha Imose.》

《...WHat?》

《I AM unable to bring Kuroha Imose back to this dimension.》

My mind went blank. Kuroha's face appeared in my vision for a
moment, then vanished.

What did they just say? They can't bring Kuroha back...?

My head was spinning. My heart was pounding violently. My legs
were trembling like crazy. Kuroha... my sister... wasn't coming back...

“That... can't be...”

If suddenly going insane was something that could actually
happen, then I wanted to do so right now. I wanted to stop seeing
reality and to be able to stop thinking about anything. But my mind
was still firmly planted in my head, and everything I could see and
hear right now was registering properly.

“No way... no way, no way... no way... no way...!”

《HOLD on, Gin-gin. Calm down!》

“Kuroha...”

《PHYsical manipulation doesn't actually erase the body. IT just
sends the body to another dimension temporarily.》

“But they said they can't bring her back...”

《THE origin of physical manipulation... WAS from a scientist
who researched traveling to the 2nd dimension TO realize her own
dream... THat research was passed down to FUTure generations and
eventually completed.》

A scientist? The 2nd dimension? Was that...

“...I see. So there's still hope-noda.”

It was the professor's work!

The professor laughed self-derisively.

“Geez... I wasn't expecting one of my inventions to survive in this
form-noda.”

“Professor! What do you mean when you say there’s still hope?! Please tell me!”

“Well, I haven’t successfully traveled to the 2nd dimension yet, but I’ve already figured out the most important factor in order to travel between dimensions-noda.”

“What’s that?”

“Do I have to spell it out? It’s love-noda.”

“Love...”

“If their physical manipulation really is based on my research... Then it might be possible to reach Kuro-chan, who’s been taken to the far ends of another dimension. With the power of love-noda.”

“—!”

We can bring Kuroha back!

《Anija, YOu must order ETUR Pantyhose to be the intermediary SO that Gin-gin’s feelings CAN reach Kuroha Imose.》

《B-BUT... if Kuroha Imose returns, THEN we...》

《STOp grumbling!》

WRUR-san’s words overpowered RBUR-san. As if following orders, ETUR-san then floated toward me and landed on my shoulder.

“Imose-kun, think deeply about Kuro-chan. If you manage to reach her, then you can bring her back-noda.”

“Got it!”

I shut my eyes and conjured up Kuroha’s figure behind my eyelids.

Kuroha in kindergarten. Kuroha in elementary school. Kuroha in middle school. Kuroha in high school. Kuroha wearing a swimsuit. Kuroha wearing pajamas. Kuroha after taking a bath. Kuroha lying in my bed. Kuroha and I embracing each other...

I prayed. While imagining the sight of Kuroha, I prayed to the empty sky.

It was then that a pitch-black space appeared in my mind. Was this a projection of the other dimension that Kuroha had been taken to? It was an empty space filled with never-ending darkness.

Where are you? Where are you, Kuroha?

I thought hard about her, but the space remained pitch-black. I couldn’t find her.

“It can’t be, why...”

Were my feelings not enough? That was impossible!

“Imose-kun. Looking at it normally, your love for Kuroha should be more than enough. But... there’s probably an imbalance between what Kuro-chan thinks of you, and what you think of Kuro-chan. That’s why you can’t find her-noda...”

Imbalance...? I’m thinking so much about her right now. I’m thinking about nothing but her... But that’s still not enough?!

“Just how much does Nee love Nii...”

“It’s a wonderful thing, but has its drawbacks at times like this...”

Even Miru and Sensei were looking unsure.

Damn it. You’re too strong, Kuroha. Your love is too strong! Why do you love someone like me that much?! You’re such an idiot... Kuroha...

《Anija. WHat is the time limit to bring Kuroha Imose back?》

《...THRee or four minutes...》

Three or four minutes?! No way... I had to find a way to reach Kuroha before then!

“Gin-san...”

Someone touched my shoulder, which gave me a jolt. I looked beside me and saw Yuzu-san. In tears, she started lashing out at RBUR-san.

“This is all so absurd... Because... if Gin-san is the ‘Great Father,’ then Kuroha-san is the ‘Great Mother!’ You all should know about the feelings behind *Oniaka*, don’t you?!”

《.....》

“...Yuzu-san, what are you talking about?”

She looked me in the eyes. “Look, Gin-san. You think that the feelings within *Oniaka* are my feelings, right? That’s actually wrong. The feelings contained in that book... are Kuroha’s.”

“...Huh?”

She kept talking, still crying. *Ani MAJI Mania* was the work that *Oniaka* was based on. She explained that she was the one who wrote it, but the feelings expressed within the book—the feelings for the older brother, were almost entirely Kuroha’s.

“Homyura’s appearance is based off of mine’s, but the foundation of her heart... is Kuroha.”

“—?!” I was shocked.

“...Gin-kun, you never noticed?” Sensei had appeared behind us.

“Did you know, Sensei...?”

“When we returned to the 23rd century, do you remember what I’d said to you? That the feelings for her brother changed form, and reached her target.”

So that meant Homyura’s feelings... were Kuroha’s feelings for me?!

“Nii, you were the only one who never noticed.”

“Well, Gin-kun is the only one who can’t read kanji. There was no way that he could’ve picked up on it,” added Yuzu-san.

That’s true. I was the only one who couldn’t read kanji in our group...

.....

Sensei’s words reminded me of something. I was the only one of us who couldn’t read kanji. I grew up in the current day, so that was a matter of course. I had never questioned it in my life before. But thinking about it now, wasn’t it a little strange? ...Why was I the only

one who couldn't read kanji? Even though so many people around me can read it...

《...Gin-gin, IT'S best that you don't think about that...》WRUR-san said from within my pocket.

Are you implying that there's a reason why I can't read kanji? And that knowledge has been passed down in the future?

《...YES.》

What is it?

《...I can't say.》

Then don't bring it up with me like that. It'll bother me until I die. Tell me!

《...Gin-gin, YOur little sisters can read kanji. IT seems like you think it's a SPEcial trait with their genes, BUT that's incorrect. ANYone can learn to read kanji if they study enough. YOur sisters were brought up in THE Imose household, which excels in language, so THEY obtained their reading SKills from the environment around them.》

But I can't read it even though I was also brought up in the Imose household. And when we traveled to the Heisei era, I studied quite a bit, but could still barely read anything...

《.....》

Something that should be possible for anyone wasn't possible for me. It was like...

—!

I thought of something. *I see... so that was it...*

Sadame-san had said this to me once before—"You're the one who can't read."

That day at the hotel in the summer, RBUR-san and WRUR-san had mentioned the "reason" that I created symbol writing. I had an innate way of thinking that differed from other people... But in exchange, I lacked some things that were normal for others.

《AND the one who made it easier FOR someone like YOur to live in this world was...》

—I understood everything now.

Odaira-sensei had once said in an interview in *Literary Gal* that the current-day Japanese was a "barrier-free" language. The world today was indeed barrier-free for me. The reason the world had changed to the way it was today was because of *Oniaka*. *Ani MAJI Mania* was the basis for *Oniaka*, and the feelings behind *Ani MAJI Mania* were Kuroha's feelings for me.

In that case... I, I...

...Was constantly surrounded by Kuroha's love.

Kuroha had changed the world to make it easier for me to live in. She hadn't done so on purpose, and it wasn't through her powers alone. But it was still a fact that her feelings created a world catered to me...

When I was a kid, *Oniaka* healed the wounds in my heart. It inspired me to become a novelist. You could even say it gave me a reason to live. If the world had been different, I might never have found a dream to work toward. I might have just been left to waste in a harsher society.

But Kuroha... My little sister! She created a world where I could fly! A world just for me...!

I see now, Kuroha. I understand now.

"I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby."

That means that you want to create a world where I can create children—as in works of literature and future cultures, right?

That's it! Isn't that it, Kuroha?! Answer me, Kuroha!

I felt like I was going crazy over my love for Kuroha. I felt like the person known as Kuroha Imose had woven my own soul for me.

Right now, I wouldn't hesitate to dedicate my everything to her.

So. So, so...

Come back into my arms!

I shut my eyes. The same black space spread out before me.

She's not here. Kuroha's not here...

If you're not here, I can't create anything! Your older brother is hopeless, so if I don't have a proper sister by my side, I won't be able to do anything! Stay with me, and watch me grow up so I'm not as hopeless anymore, even if it's just a little bit!

I've decided now! I'll only write novels for you from now on. I won't write to make anyone else happy, only to make you happy! That's the only reason I'll write. Even if it happens to save someone else in the end, I'll only write for you.

I realized it now. Culture, literature, civilization... The driving force that shaped this world was—love. You couldn't create anything without love. You couldn't do anything if you didn't have someone to love.

So come back. Please. Please, please come back to me.

Please let me love you!

—Kuroha!

In that moment...

I saw a light in the far distance. It was a faint, flickering light that

lit up the dark space.

I had to go there. I focused my mind on that spot and felt myself progressing toward the light. The light was getting closer and closer. I reached out my hand, and imagined myself grasping the light.

And then I heard a yelp.

Huh, it feels warm, I thought, and opened my eyes—to see a slender body within my arms.

Long, shiny black hair. Well-defined eyes and a sharp jawline. A modest chest... I was holding my little sister.

I squeezed my arms tight and reaffirmed her warmth. It was one of the happiest moments of my life.



“Onii-chan...?”

“...ha.” I attempted to say her name, but only choked out a hoarse whisper. *That was pretty uncool, let me try again.* I took in a big breath and yelled out, “Kuroha, Kuroha, Kuroha, Kuroha, Kuroha, Kuroha... Kuroha!”

“H-Hold on, Onii-chan... It hurts...”

“Kuroha...” My face was covered in tears and snot. *I’m sorry for looking so dirty. But, but...!*

I didn’t know if it was because she hadn’t realized she’d been erased, or if she was just taken aback by me, but she smiled.

“What a face you’re making.”

“...I finally found you... You came back...”

“...I don’t really understand, but did I...?”

“Yeah, you disappeared.”

Kuroha was sharp, so she figured out what had happened to her to an extent. I squeezed my arms tight to make sure I wouldn’t let her go.

In the future, words would die off. And now I think I understood the reason why. Just by hugging Kuroha like this, I felt like we were understanding each other more and more.

She was laughing in my arms. Her hair was fluttering in the breeze as she smiled. I wanted to burn this image in my memory. No matter how many thousands of hours we would spend together after this, I wanted this moment to remain a vivid memory.

“Hey, Onii-chan...”

“Hm?”

“What all just happened? I felt like you were... desperately trying to convey your feelings to me...”

“That was all real.”

She blushed a bit. “B-But, you were talking about, love and stuff...”

“That was also real.”

“I-I see... Does that mean I disappeared, but it was you who brought me back, Onii-chan...?”

“...” I was too embarrassed to say yes, so I remained quiet. But she could tell the answer from the way I was behaving.

“Sigh... it’s all over,” she said in relief.

“Huh?”

“I can’t believe it. It’s really all over...”

She tilted her head to one side, like she was giving up on something. Her words were worrying, but she wrapped her arms around my back.

“What do you mean?”

She smiled, “It’s all done. Kuroha Imose has become Onii-chan’s.

She has become an existence that can't think about anything other than her Onii-chan..."

"..."

"But those are just my feelings. You're the one to decide, Onii-chan."

"Decide what?"

And then she said with a much more emotional expression, "Onii-chan... can I be by your side...?"

.....

You're still wondering something like that this late in the game?!

You said that you were going to move to the Special Cultural District, but I definitely won't let you. That's because you're mine!

"...Onii-chan?"

She seemed to take my silence as a sign that I was debating my answer. She slanted her eyebrows and looked worried.

Geez. With someone like her, I had to prove my feelings with actions.

"Kuroha, close your eyes."

"...Huh?"

I decided to do something.

I was going to give what we failed to do at the hotel another shot. Back then, right before our lips touched, my inexperience made me miss the target, and I ended up kissing her on the chin. Things were awkward for a moment after that, then we started laughing, and it was no longer the right mood... So in fact, we hadn't done anything yet.

As I stared at her, she realized what I was trying to do, and closed her eyes and tilted her face upward.

...Objectively speaking, this might upset some people. But I couldn't resist. My impulses were urging me to do this. People might tell us off for getting lost in our own little world, but I couldn't help it in this situation! If I didn't do it now, then when would I?!

I focused my aim on Kuroha's lips...

And didn't miss this time.

*

* * * —※■●□23★☆▼▼— * * *

SNiff...

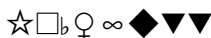
GOOD for you, Gin-gin. I'M crying.

...BUT.

IF you show me something like that, I'LL get jealous...

EVEN for a casual partner LIKE me.

I WONder how those girls are feeling...



*

Everyone watched as Gin and Kuroha embraced each other.

Odaira, Miru, and Meguri looked relieved, Yuzu was crying even more strongly, and even Amaneko had started crying.

Amaneko wiped the tears from her eyes and looked up at Yuzu.

“...Hey, Ms. Boobs...”

“What is it?”

“...Are you okay with this-nodesu?”

“.....”

Yuzu didn't answer Amaneko's loaded question.

Then, Meguri suddenly dropped to her knees.

“Yuzu-ccchi, this is how it is-noda.”

Meguri faced the ground and apologized.

“I was the one who pushed Kuro-chan to action... and this is how it ended up-noda.”

“Ended up?”

“Fate changed. We robbed you of your happiness-noda.”

“...”

“So please... let me make up for it-noda.”

Meguri looked up again and pulled something from her pocket. They were marshmallows.

“I decided to never use these again... But as you can see, I still have time traveling marshmallows-noda. If you want to, Yuzu-ccchi... You can go back to when your brother was still alive and bring him here. The doctors of this day might be able to cure him-noda.”

“.....”

“I don't think this makes up for everything-noda. But I at least want you to be happier than you are now...”

Yuzu hesitated for a moment, then took the marshmallows into her hands.

“I understand. I'll make sure to put these to good use...”

“Okay, you accepted them...” Meguri sighed in relief.

Looking at Meguri below her, Yuzu laughed resolvedly.

“But you've got something wrong, Professor. My happiness isn't over. I haven't decided to give up one bit.”

“Huh, really?” Meguri stood back up with a blank expression.

Then Miru said, “Yuzu, why did you just tell him all that?”

“...If I didn't tell Gin-san the truth about *Oniaka*, then Kuroha-san might not have been able to come back. Maybe that would result in a different relationship between Gin-san and I, but... In that case, I

would feel indebted for the rest of my life. I wouldn't be able to live with such a heavy burden."

"That's true. As someone who has lived for 70 years, I completely agree. The only heavy things we need in life are a little sister's randoseru," Odaira nodded and laughed.

"In that case... It's much more fun to think about how to snatch Gin-san away from Kuroha-san, who he's so close with," Yuzu smiled in return.

"Wow, you're much darker than I thought, Ms. Boobs...!"

"You're more relentless than I expected, Yuzu-kun. If Kuroha starts taking it easy because she's the *gimai*... This might actually be a close battle."

"Heheheh."

"Hmm, sounds fun. Maybe I should start researching this thing known as 3D love..." quipped the professor.

"The fact that you call it research already means you're hopeless," Amaneko retorted, then raised her hand. "I won't lose, either. The power of the *jitsumai* will win in the end!"

*

* * * —※■●□23★☆▼▼— * * *

THE girls around Gin-gin are so optimistic. I SHOuld learn from them!

—Huh? WHat is it, Anija?

IT is over for us now?

THen... why...

Why HAVe we NOT been erased?

Gin-gin said THat he would start writing novels only for Kuroha Imose, AND he'll walk down a path different from the "right path" of history. HE'll likely publish a novel that is VERY different from the original.

But... THen it can just be translated into the language of the future.

BY Amaneko Makoto.

Geez, WHY are you so surprised, Anija? THis means that your plans worked out in the end.

SHe'll USE the inheritance from her grandfather to create the "New Word Order," and will at least publish a book or two.

Gin-gin WAS feeling guilty for using Amaneko Makoto in this way, BUT she'll probably happily translate his work—OR should I say

interpret?

TO rewrite the novel for the future, she'll at least change THE main character to be a pair of pantyhose.

To create THE future.

...SO with that, WILL you stop with the unnecessary interference, Anija?

I'D like to come here to play again, but I'm TIred of being an observer and would like TO return to the future soon.

WHY, you ask?

BECause after all you said, I NEEd to remind you about the importance OF little sisters again!

☆□♀∞◆▼▼

*

It was all over. We were on the roof of the Tower of Culture.

Now that the professor unsealed RBUR-san's and WRUR-san's powers, they were happily floating next to each other.

It seemed like WRUR-san had already told RBUR-san about my idea—to have Amaneko-chan rewrite my novels. I didn't know if it would be successful, but I took their continued existence right now as a good sign. RBUR-san accepted the idea for now and promised to stop targeting Kuroha.

《Gin-gin, I PROMise I'll come back TO play again.》

“Yeah, I'll be waiting.”

They said that they'd return to the future.

《OH “Great Father.” I will never forget YOu.》

“I won't forget you, either. Please come play with us again, RBUR-san. By the way, is there a discount package for time traveling or something?”

《...I did NOT come here to play...》

“Make sure you bring souvenirs next time!”

《...》

And then, a large number of pantyhose appeared out of nowhere around RBUR-san and WRUR-san. They were the troops.

RBUR-san and WRUR-san linked themselves together, started spinning around like a merry-go-round, and began ascending. The troops followed in suit. And then...

A pillar of light formed on the rooftop of the Tower of Culture. It was a gate of sorts that the Pantyhose Party summoned to travel through time as a group.

The Pantyhose Party formed a spiral going up the pillar of light,

and ascended to the heavens like they were being sucked toward it.

I had a sudden thought. The outer wall of the Tower of Culture was painted with murals representing Japanese culture across the generations. From the Stone Ages, to the Middle Ages, and now current day.

The Pantyhose Party were now headed to the future from this tower that symbolized the past to the present.

“I leave the future to you.”

...Is what I wanted to say, but it didn't really make sense here.

“Onii-chan, you're trying too hard...”

“Yeah, Onii-sama, you're pretty pretentious-nodesu.”

My little sisters were already telling me off.

The Pantyhose Party was gradually ascending to the heavens before our eyes. The past, the present, and the future... I watched them until the very last one disappeared, and the pillar of light vanished.



Dear English Readers of the 21st Century,

This book is a translated edition of *Boku no Imouto wa Kanji ga Yomeru*, which itself is a translation from the original 23rd-century Japanese novel *KANJI YOMU IMOUTO*, by Gin Imose. In the story, kanji characters are a prominent feature, and although the main character is unable to read them, the original translator assumed that the reader can read kanji. In a number of places, therefore, I have left the original kanji or Japanese and provided parenthetical translations for the benefit of English readers. Also, in order to maintain some of the authenticity of the original 23rd-century work, I have incorporated a number of features of 23rd-century English grammar such as honorifics (*san*, *kun*) and forms of address like *Sensei* and *Onii-chan*. In order to distinguish between sections and words which were left in the original 23rd-century Japanese, I have used all capital letters, and have done my best to approximate the orthodox literary style within the confines of 21st-century English.

The English Translator

Dear People of the 21st Century,

This book is a retitled and translated edition of LILSIS READ KANJI 5 (by Gin Imose), which was published in the 23rd century. This translation is not literal, and it has been adjusted in order to be more easily readable by 21st-century readers. It is important I explain about my use of kanji in the translation.

This is a first-person story, narrated by a main character who cannot read kanji, and yet I have used kanji in this translation. All of these kanji are my own interpretive translation of the original kanji-less text. In the original work, kanji are only used in a very few select places.

And with that, I would like to give my warmest thanks to the original author, Mr. Gin Imose, as well as the many other people involved. Without your cooperation and hard work, this edition would not have been possible.

The Translator

Fate works in mysterious ways. Things that I would never have imagined just a few months ago are now reality. After this incident, the relationship between Kuroha and I transformed into something more certain. I'll leave the particulars to your imagination. The one thing I can say is that I know a lot more about girls now.

A fire had been lit within Kuroha, and she was now motivated to a frightening degree to make sure I debuted and became a successful author. She kept repeating that even if Amaneko-chan would translate

my books to pass on to the future, it was most important that I write an interesting story first.

I wasn't worried about that, though. My motivation was also higher than it ever was, and most importantly, Kuroha was here with me.

I would write a story, and that story would be passed to the future. It sounded like a dream, but I was the one who had to make it reality. On top of that... The future might not be the only place that my story would be traveling.

After everything was done, we all talked amongst ourselves on the way home from the Tower of Culture. It was just brought up as a joke... But there was a chance that it wouldn't be left as one.

It's be very interesting if we could pull it off. I'd be curious to see what the reactions would be like, and it'd be an astounding goal to have...

—...

We were on the way home after seeing the Pantyhose Party off at the Tower of Culture. We were all walking down the sidewalk of the ARIAKE BRIDGE headed to TOKYO station.

TOKYO station was a fair distance away from the Tower of Culture, so normally we'd ride the cutting-edge monorail known as the ARIAKE LINER, but then Sensei suggested, "It's nice to go for a walk together after finishing up a piece of work. A boy and girl walking together under the evening sun... How nice and youthful."

We took him up on his suggestion. Amaneko-chan was the only one who had to return in a different direction, but she said she'd see us off at the station.

It was evening. Below the bridge was TOKYO Bay. The setting sun reflected on the rippling water surface. The sea breeze blowing from beneath the bridge felt soothing. Just as Sensei had said, this did feel youthful.

Now that matters had finally been settled, there was an air of relief between all of us. We were talking with each other as we walked, but the topic of conversation was nothing other than the Pantyhose Party. We had encountered beings from the future, and they were talking pantyhose, so of course everyone was still recovering from the shock. The professor was the only calm one.

"Aww, humanity is going to go extinct, Imose-kun. Are you sure about that decision-noda?" Her words seemed like she was blaming me, but she was smiling.

"The fact that humanity will go extinct one day and that pantyhose will become rulers of the world might be hard to accept for

someone today. But... for example, 2D culture is a magnificent thing for us, but people from the past wouldn't understand that at all. It's pretty much the same thing."

"People from the past wouldn't understand, huh..." After pondering my words for a moment, the professor said, "It'd be interesting to try-noda."

"Try?"

"Yeah, just a thought. We could try translating a book from this time and have people from the past read it-noda."

...

"Are you also saying that you still have those time traveling marshmallows? I thought you said that you threw them out because you wouldn't use them anymore."

"No, I don't have them anymore-noda." The professor glanced at Yuzu-san.

I thought that this was just another one of the professor's jokes, but Sensei and Yuzu-san also seemed interested in the idea, and they began discussing it further.

It wouldn't be interesting enough to translate a story and give it to just one or two people to read. To get opinions from a larger amount of people, they wanted to publish it as a book.

"It's not so easy to get a book published." Kuroha was the voice of reason.

"True. But there's a good way. You can enter a Newcomers Award from back then and win a prize."

"No way that would happen. If you enter a book from this time period, it'd seem like total nonsense and wouldn't pass. Just like Onii-chan said earlier, the people of the past wouldn't be able to understand it."

"Hm... When you put it that way..."

I hit a dead end, but then Odaira-sensei smiled and said, "That may be true. The people of the past wouldn't be able to understand the way the world is now. But just by reading a book from the future that they wouldn't normally be able to read, they would at least start thinking about the future. I think that in itself would be a wonderful thing."

"The old fart is saying something sensible. Guess the world's ending tomorrow."

"Sensei... I'm touched!"

That's right. Even if they couldn't understand it, it might at least inspire them to think about something. That alone was enough reason to have a person from the past read a current-day book!

The professor suggested that the book we translate would be my "LILIS READ KANJI." She proposed that in addition to my own

perspective, we could include sections from the perspectives of people like Mr. Bedhead and WRUR-san to expand on the story. I appreciated her enthusiasm, but...

"...That's just a personal experience diary, I wasn't planning to turn it into a book."

"No no, that's exactly what I want to see-noda. Ahahahah."

It would be really interesting if this idea turned into reality, but we had no more time-traveling marshmallows, so it was just a joke. After coming to that conclusion, I continued toying with the idea with everyone else, but one person was passionately muttering, "I agree. I'll definitely make it happen."

That was Yuzu-san.

"That's a great idea. If we want to translate it for the people of the past to read, then I can do it!"

"Grr... I could do it too if I put my mind to it-nodesu... But I'll leave this one to Ms. Boobs..." said Amaneko-chan.

"I'll definitely see it through. I'll start studying now to make sure it happens!" Yuzu-san was talking about it as if it was actually possible for her to do. "I've decided. I'll make that my goal for living in this time period."

Her words contained strength. She already had experience from writing *Ani MAJI Mania*, and according to Kuroha and Sensei, she had a talent for writing, so becoming a translator wasn't out of the question.

If this didn't just end as a joke, and really happened... That would mean Amaneko-chan would send my story to the future, and Yuzu-san to the past. The idea got me excited and more motivated to write.

The past and the future. There were no limits to this story... But before that, the us in the present had to work hard to create this story.

I looked at Kuroha, who was walking next to me. I said something in my head that was a little too embarrassing to say out loud.

Hey, Kuroha. It's all thanks to you creating this world, thanks to you being by my side, that I'm able to write this story. You're the origin of my writing.

RBUR-san had once asked me "literature" or "little sister," but now, those two things were inseparable for me. So this was my answer:

—Little sisters are literature.

It's thanks to you that I'm able to answer that now. I'm probably the happiest big brother in the world right now.

As I thought that, Kuroha said, "Thinking about it, wouldn't 'LILSIS READ KANJI' be a little too weird for the title of a modern literature novel?"

She was making some stiff comments as usual.

“Okay then, soon-to-be translator Yuzu-san. If you were to turn ‘LILSIS READ KANJI’ into a modern literature title, what would it be?”

“‘LILSIS READ KANJI’ is referring to Kuroha from Gin-san’s perspective, right?”

“Yep.”

Yuzu-san nodded and tilted her head.

“Nii-sama, what about something like this-nodesu?” chimed Amaneko-chan.

“I also thought of something. It’s about me though, so it’s a little embarrassing,” said Kuroha.

“I also have an idea,” said Yuzu-san.

All three of them spoke at once and vocalized a certain title. As an amusing coincidence, all three of them had thought up the exact same thing. They were unbelievably in sync, but I figured it might just be a prank from the gods of the past, present, and future.

The harmony of their voices rang in my ears.



Afterword

Hey, it's been a while. Kajii here.

I know that some people like to read a book starting from the afterword, but in this case I'd like to ask that you read the book first before reading this afterword. Will I talk about major spoilers? ...Well, something like that. So if you haven't finished reading the book yet, please turn back and do so now.

*

...Okay, is it safe now? Now then—that concludes My Little Sister Can Read Kanji. Thank you so much for sticking with it until the end!

I was able to write about 90% of what I had originally intended to write without making any major cuts or extensions. As for the remaining 10%, I wanted to include a bunch of long-winded dirty jokes... Er, I mean... I wanted to go into more detail about the thoughts and feelings of the female characters, yeah!

I'm a man, but I tend to self-insert as the heroine instead of the male protagonist, so when I start writing, I start feeling like a young girl in love. That sounds absolutely gross coming from an adult man, but it's a fact I can't deny. The latter half of the series had stronger romance factors. When I write using my natural emotions, the romantic tones get stronger... Of course, there's no such thing as romantic tones in my real life!

...And now that I've made myself the butt of my own joke, it's time to move on to the thank you section.

To the illustrator, Minamura-sensei. This might sound banal, but thank you so much for the adorable illustrations. I had assumed that your favorite was either Miru or Odaira-sensei (girl form), so I was surprised when you said you liked Professor Choumabayashi the most.

To my editor, H-san. Sorry for being such an annoying writer to deal with... If it wasn't for your guidance, I don't think I would have made it this far.

To Haco Hitsuji-sensei, who is adapting this novel to manga format. Thank you for granting me the experience of having my story adapted to a manga. I'll be supporting you as one of the readers.

And to everyone who was involved with this book, my family, and my friends, I give my biggest thanks. I also want to give my thanks again to all the readers who sent in fan letters.

The novel ends here, but the manga adaptation is currently being serialized in Comic Gangan (congratulations on the release of Volume 1 the other day), so please give your support there as well.

There are still many things I want to write, and my motivation is through the roof, so I'm sure I'll return to you all one day. I hope to see you all again with my next series... With that, thank you for reading!

July 2012, Takashi Kajii

Translator's Note (Apology)

Dear Readers,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading this series all the way to the end. Normally, with a five volume series like this, that wouldn't be all that great a feat to deserve such praise, but considering the extremely long gap between the releases of the last two volumes, I do really appreciate your not forgetting this humble launch series from J-Novel Club.

I sincerely apologize for the extremely long wait for this final volume. When I began translating this series, it was during the early days of J-Novel Club, and I decided to translate it myself for two reasons. One was to get a sense myself, directly, of the scheduling and work-flow we were expecting of our translators. And the second, frankly speaking, was to save some money for initial cash flow purposes.

I did not expect, or properly anticipate, the rapid success of J-Novel Club, and the quick increase in translation and editing management that started to take up more and more of my time, and it became clear that I had to choose between priorities. The businessman in me looked at the numbers, and the rest is as you might expect: a continuous putting off of this in favor of other things, of new licenses, of new freelancers, of new publishers, etc, etc, etc... Even when I finally worked through volume 4, it was an extreme struggle to maintain a proper schedule, and I realized then even again that before I would be able to work on the 5th and final volume, I would need to accomplish a big goal: stabilizing J-Novel Club as a business. And finally, this year, I feel like I've approached that position.

To me, I view Siskan as marker posts in the history of J-Novel Club itself. The first three volumes are the rush of the start, when everything was new and had to be figured out, and there was always this looming uncertainty like with any startup business. By the end of this period, J-Novel Club turned profitable, and that initial looming uncertainty faded. When volume 4 was released, a second soft barrier had been hit: We had hit the limits of our work-flow management structure. With the number of employees at the time (2-3 ish), it was becoming impossible to keep track of projects, to manage the ever growing stable of freelancers, and to have clear communication with the Japanese publishing partners, even amidst the successful sales

figures. And finally, with the release of volume 5, I feel like the expanded management structure, 8 employees, and significant reforms in work-flow, allow J-Novel Club to grow in a stable and controlled manner for years to come.

And now that you have read to the end, perhaps you see why I chose this series as a launch title in the first place? (Besides the fact that I found them hilarious and a fascinating translation challenge.) These books are, at their heart, about translation itself. They are about localizing works of art for an audience unable to understand them without the hard working translators and editors. This is J-Novel Club's purpose.

The reveal at the end, that the unnamed "translator" from the first note in the first volume was, in fact, Yuzu-san, presents an interesting question for how to interpret the books. There is no less reliable narrator, after all, than a translator who is a character in the story itself. So how much of this story is even to be believed? I have a theory about this, which is likely overthinking things, but I think it makes this crazy story even more bold of the original author...

The main character Gin has never fit in at school. He has trouble communicating with others, and will sometimes have violent outbursts which shock people around him. He copes by becoming extremely absorbed in a certain type of literature, and ends up writing prose in a way which almost no one can even interpret, let alone understand. He likely has a significant learning disability, which is why no matter how hard he studies, he can never properly learn kanji. All these clues tell me that Gin is likely a high functioning autistic, and that everyone in this story knows this. Yuzu's translation has likely smoothed over and embellished this fact in the story, making it not as obvious as it would have been, but all the pieces are there. So another interpretation of this series is one that explores how it is that people can care for people like Gin, and both try to understand them and create an environment where they can thrive. If this is really something the author was attempting to do, it's extremely bold for a work originally turned in as a newcomer's prize entry in a light novel writing contest. But this is just one interpretation, and I'm sure you, the reader, will have your own opinions.

Thank you again for reading this series all the way to the end. I'm glad I had the opportunity to see it completed, and I hope that it at least made you laugh. If I was able to do that, then maybe I succeeded at least a little bit in the goal of translating.

January 2021, Samuel Pinansky



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My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 5
by Takashi Kajii

Translated by Samuel Pinansky

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